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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

ALBERTA IN FICTION

by

(C) DAVID C. CARPENTER

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

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Supervisor

External Examiner

Date. 16. Aug. 73

ABSTRACT

Alberta attracted the attention of a large number of novelists between the turn of the century and the second great war. Their fiction was generally too sentimental or too biased to do justice to their region. The most positive exception to the failures of these early writers was George Bugnet's La Forêt (1935), a realistic novel which evinced a strong reliance upon accurately observed regional details.

As a sign, perhaps, of the gradual cultural maturity of the province, a number of relatively sophisticated novels followed shortly after the depression. Some were realistic, for example novels by Edward McCourt, Christine Van der Mark and Henry Kreisel. Some were comic or serio-comic, for example novels by Ralph Allen and W. O. Mitchell. Most important, though, was that these novels evoked a demonstrably strong sense of region.

In Howard O'Hagan's Tay John (1939) the emphasis was on myth, romance and satire. In many ways Robert Kroetsch's three novels, written in the late sixties, move in O'Hagan's direction and away from traditional realism. Especially in Kroetsch's novels there is evidence that Alberta is being written about less as a glamourized, tourist fantasy and more as an historical fact. In other words, a distinctive regional flavour is beginning to be reflected in Alberta's fiction.

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CHAPTER I

This study is a description of the ways in which a number of novelists have attempted to write about Alberta between 1899 and 1972. I use the term novelist to apply simply to writers of novel-length regional fiction, and not strictly to writers of the novel (as opposed to the romance or the confessional or other fictional forms). Robert Kroetsch, in his later work, shows a preference for satiric writing and Howard O'Hagan shows a preference for the romance. But both writers, within the terms of this thesis, are novelists who write regional fiction.

The fiction of a regional writer is regulated by tendencies to particularize and universalize his surroundings. The second tendency, of course, arises out of the first. I have labelled the tendency to particularize, the centripetal impulse, and the tendency to universalize, the centrifugal. The centripetal impulse is manifested by its fidelity to the local scene, its accurate description of the physical environment, its approximation of local diction, history and manners. The centrifugal is the impulse upon which a writer's greatness in the eyes of the world outside his region inevitably rests. This is the impulse which engages the least parochial and most cosmopolitan of minds, the impulse which arranges the curious details of local colour into an artistic pattern.

The process of universalizing one's material is dependent upon the process of particularizing it. We reach the universal through the particular. The movement from the first to the second process is not a change in artistic function, but simply a change of focus from minutely observed details to larger issues.

Just as the regional novelist modulates back and forth from the centripetal to the centrifugal impulse, the careful reader must move with him from an emphasis on regional fidelity to larger matters. To the extent that the reader of regional fiction focusses upon particulars, he would approximate the activity of the regional scholar. He would consider the author's familiarity with his region. The danger of pursuing the centripetal impulse too exclusively comes when one attempts to base one's judgements of fiction upon the principles of regional fidelity rather than upon aesthetic principles. To the extent that the reader focusses upon universals, he would approximate the activity of the critic. And if he too follows his impulse (to move centrifugally) too exclusively, he encounters the danger of considering the fiction in isolation from its regional milieu. So rather than focus exclusively upon particulars or universals, as only the most limited of regional scholars and critics appear to do, the reader must modulate as the book demands. In this sense, he becomes both regional scholar and critic.

The final product of my research in this study will

be some critical judgements on various works of Alberta fiction. But these judgements cannot be arrived at until they are informed by an historical knowledge of the region. When questions arise as to the native impulse in or regional flavour of Alberta fiction, it is helpful to know something about the historical sources of that impulse or that flavour.

In a sense this study is a chronicle of Alberta's impingement upon and creation of the Alberta imagination, and at the same time, a chronicle of twenty-one writers' impingement upon and creation of the region we call Alberta. The novelist, insofar as the free, subjective play of his feelings is allowed to govern his impulse to write, 'creates' Alberta. And Alberta (which in the beginning was a simple, geographical entity) controls, through its impact on his mind, the writer's creation. My study investigates this impact of novelist and region, of mind and matter.

At the turn of the century, this meeting between the fiction writer and his subject was unsure, even comic in its uncertainty. But since the mid-thirties the writer has come to treat his subject with more understanding. Perhaps he has gained a greater awareness of its terrain, its people, and its collective dreams and nightmares. Benjamin Spencer, in his essay on literary regionalism, writes that a good regional literature is a cultural signpost which indicates that a region's people have come to terms with their region. "A regional literature is the articulation of those terms."[1]

If this is so, then it is in the novels of men like Henry Kreisel and Robert Kroetsch (and several others) that this process of coming to terms is beginning.

Having studied some examples of writers who separate or confuse the functions of the regional scholar and the critic, I have chosen to unite these two functions. A typical example of the type of research I am attempting to avoid is Roy Meyer's The Middle Western Farm Novel in the Twentieth Century.[2] He "repeatedly stresses the primary significance of farm fiction as social commentary rather than its secondary importance as artistic creation" (5). His recipe for a good farm novel is one which handles well the physical details of farming, uses the vernacular in an authentic way, and reflects and accepts attitudes characteristic of farm folk. These are rural conservatism, anti-intellectualism and hostility to 'the town.' Also, Mr. Meyer believes that novelists ought to "promote understanding among sections and among occupations" (199). It is not surprising, from this manifesto, that Meyer avoids Faulkner and Steinbeck. Nor is it suprising that he is suspicious of eastern literary magazines like The New Yorker because of their "distinctively urban" bias. He crusades "against the domination exercised over art and letters and over much of our thinking and living by Eastern capitals of finance and politics" (181). In the case of Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, Meyer is irked by her "annoying stylistic tricks and a

tendency toward overdramatization of materials" (225). Yet Meyer admires Arthur Stringer's Prairie Wife for the realistic treatment of his Alberta setting and the life of its inhabitants. But Carlyle King, comparing Stringer and Ostenso in 1961, reminds us (and quite properly) that it is Ms. Ostenso who is revered by posterity as the first prairie realist, not Stringer; and that Stringer fell far short of achieving a realistic interpretation of prairie life.[3] King's criteria for realistic fiction are drawn inductively from the American and Canadian realists of the early twentieth century: Hemingway, Dreiser, Faulkner, Grove, Callaghan and others. How has Meyer arrived at his condemnation of Wild Geese? He has attempted to use the criteria of a regional agricultural sociologist to measure excellence in what is basically an aesthetic discipline. In other words, he has confused a scholarly function with a critical function.

Two brief studies of Alberta fiction are germane at this point. The first one was done by Elaine Catley, who delivers a eulogy on Alberta's literature: "It is small wonder that the crystal-clear air, the brilliant sunshine, and the space and freedom of Alberta, have nourished many writers. The majesty of the towering Rockies to the West, their snow-clad peaks visible for more than eighty miles, vast stores of coal, natural gas and oil--all these are a delight and an inspiration."[4] That was in 1943. Seven years later Frances Coulson carried on in the same eulogistic vein

in a second study of Alberta in literature. "Despite the 'viewing with alarm' of a certain Royal Commission, the type of literature Alberta has produced needs no apologies. It possesses warmth and vigour. If it is crude in spots it is because Albertans (like their mountains) still preserve their sharp outline--not yet affected by the bevelling forces of time and civilization."[5] Where Professor Meyer has made the mistake of confusing regional sociology and criticism, Ms. Catley and Ms. Coulson have made the mistake of confusing provincialism (or book marketing) and criticism.

There is a third unsatisfactory approach to our nineteen writers of Alberta fiction. This approach is the purely historical one. In the coming chapters of this study, I will cite some examples of literary history which are flawed because uninformed by criticism. Not that historians have been idle. Writers such as Ralph Connor, Arthur Stringer, F. J. Niven, R. J. C. Stead and W. O. Mitchell have received extensive treatments. Henry Kreisel's work has been commented upon by several literary historians (although no major study of his work exists). And Nellie McClung has received attention from at least a dozen such commentators. In fact none of these writers has been completely neglected.

Still, taking into account all past criticism and scholarship on these writers, there is hardly any commentary upon their works in terms of an informed regional framework. And with the exceptions of E. A. McCourt and Robert Kroetsch,

there are hardly any incisive critical studies of their works. The considerable bulk of scholarship on Alberta writers, to which I have only briefly alluded, will be referred to in greater detail in chapters II and VI primarily.

The bothersome question of the existence of an Alberta tradition in fiction must now be confronted. It is not difficult to isolate national, even regional traditions which have arisen in older cultures. It is not difficult, for instance, to trace origins of the British romantic tradition from its Platonic and medieval beginnings, through to the seventeenth century mystics (such as Traherne and Vaughan), and then to the preromantic and Gothic writers of the later eighteenth century, then up to the Lake District poets and their followers who, in turn, influenced the Victorian and modern neo-primitive poets. It is, similarly, not a difficult exercise to trace the emergence of an Irish regional literature, a New England regional literature, or even an American Gothic tradition of the Deep South.

But tracing Canadian literary traditions, let alone Canadian regional traditions, is truly an exercise in pioneering of a painfully intricate nature. Northrop Frye has said: "A reader may feel a sense of unreality in efforts to attach Canadian writers to a tradition made up of earlier writers whom they may not have read or greatly admired. I have felt this myself whenever I have written about Canadian

literature. Yet I keep coming back to the feeling that there does seem to be such a thing as an imaginative continuum, and that writers are conditioned in their attitudes by their predecessors, or by the cultural climate of their predecessors, whether there is conscious influence or not."[6]

I do not know, for instance, how much of Ralph Connor Nellie McClung read, or vice versa. As far as I have been able to discover, it is not recorded anywhere. I only know that they knew each other through their crusades in politics. I doubt that Henry Kreisel was much influenced by F. J. Niven. But I find it interesting that there is an ideological thread which connects these two. I am quite sure that Robert Kroetsch has read Ralph Connor, R. J. C. Stead, Ralph Allen, Christine Van der Mark and W. O. Mitchell. But it is very difficult to ascertain to what extent these writers influenced him because, as a professor of modern literature, his literary interests have been worldwide.

Another example of this kind of scholarship presents itself in the case of Georges Bugnet. From my conversations with him I discovered that Bugnet had read and known Nellie McClung before and during his writing career. I found out as well that she was the only fiction writer from Alberta whom he knew or read. He did not share her views on prohibition. He did not share her moral and political views on the Brownlee scandal of 1934. He did not share her

literary tastes. And although he professed to have a good friendship with her, he was not particularly impressed by her writing. In short, there is no biographical evidence for Ms. McClung having influenced M. Bugnet's fiction. But is this fact surprising or significant? It is certainly a typical fact of Alberta literary history. In a province younger than the average life span of a man, there have been, understandably, very few competent writers. And therefore the significant literary influences which shaped and inspired the Alberta fiction writers came almost always from outside the province. One comes to discover influences like the following: William Henry Drummond was a strong influence upon Ralph Connor, Kipling a strong influence on R. J. C. Stead, Voltaire and Racine on Georges Bugnet, Conrad on both F. J. Niven and Henry Kreisel, Mark Twain on W. O. Mitchell, and John Barth on Robert Kroetsch. A thorough study of these influences within and without is not germane to this thesis. But wherever such knowledge helps to shed some new light on writers or trends in Alberta fiction, I will make use of it.

The "cultural climate" referred to by Frye, however, is of more importance. And the author's implied views of the people and their land are more important as well. For the region and its people, and the cultural climate they create, have always had their impact upon the mind of the novelist. So that variety of scholarship, the object of which is to collect the personal correspondence of writers, or to

establish biographical connections between writers, is peripheral to (though not ignored in) this study.

Alberta, so very new as a settled province, is still in a state of becoming, and so is its literature. So instead of pursuing an already established tradition, I will be involved in isolating various trends which appear to be forming into an emergent regional tradition. Here is one small example. Robert Kroetsch claims that, because of the region they live in, Albertans are "locked" between dreams and nightmares.[7] That dream, as almost all Alberta writers have seen it, is one of quick prosperity reaped from the material resources which, in fact and in fiction, have made the province wealthy. Historically, this dream was born with the Klondike goldrush in 1897, gained impetus with the pre-war settlement and then the Leduc oil boom in 1947, and thrives still amid present prosperity. The corresponding nightmare is perhaps the inversion of this dream: the sense of spiritual loss which results with 'social conversion' to wealth.[8] All major Alberta novelists have seized segments of this dream and its concomitant nightmare. It is interesting to note how Saskatchewan novelists have tended to reject this theme in favour of a struggle for survival theme. As often as not, the personages in Saskatchewan novels are unsuccessful in this struggle. One thinks of the early W. O. Mitchell, of Ralph Allen, Arthur Storey, Wallace Stegner, Max Braithwaite, Edward McCourt, and especially

Sinclair Ross. I will return to these writers in subsequent chapters.

Once we begin discussing so-called 'Alberta themes,' 'Alberta myths,' and 'Alberta traditions' in literature, however, a new problem in distinctions arises. To what extent, we might well ask, are these diaphanous constructs merely part of the Canadian or the larger North American literary tradition? I intend, in this study, to demonstrate that while the themes which cluster around the Alberta regional traditions have a great deal in common with much larger cultural entities (North America, Canada, even England), in specific content and contour they are Albertan. I intend as well to demonstrate that the Alberta cultural milieu, and by extension its literature, is a very different thing from, say, the Saskatchewan or the British Columbia milieu and literature. Most Alberta writers under consideration have, to varying degrees, aligned their fictions with the larger Canadian or North American literary currents. But, at the same time, the Alberta which they have re-created has acquired regional metaphors different from those of its nearest neighbours.

In 1855, when American literature was well into its first flowering, Hawthorne spoke of the difficulty of national utterances and national flavour in American literature. He was aware that America then, like Canada now, was a country of many regions, a culturally diverse, pluralistic

country. Therefore, "when you try to make it a matter of the heart, everything falls away except one's native state . . . . Yet, unquestionably, we do stand by our national flag as . . . any people in the world, and I myself have felt the heart throb at sight of it as sensibly as other men."[9] Perhaps this is why, in his concern for the problems of the human heart, William Faulkner 'stayed at home' in the best and the bulk of his fiction.

A great deal of fiction has been written about Alberta, and I have therefore had to set up rigid principles of selection which would enable me to devote my attention to a manageable body of writings. Of the twenty-one novelists to be considered, only eleven will be viewed in any depth. I have chosen to ignore almost all short fiction which has been written about Alberta. Therefore the short stories of Ross Annett, J. P. Gillese, W. G. Hardy, H. F. Cruikshank, F. S. Weiss, W. A. Fraser and Kerry Wood will be excluded. And the short stories of F. P. Grove, Rudy Wiebe, Henry Kreisel, Howard O'Hagan, Wallace Stegner, W. O. Mitchell, Georges Bugnet and Robert Kroetsch will only be alluded to when they are useful in shedding light on the novel-length fiction of the major Alberta Fiction writers. This thesis is not only a critical study, as I have said, but a study of a region. The short story genre, unlike the novel, is not committed to an examination of any magnitude of its historical or social setting. I must confine myself to novel-length

fiction because of my dual interest in aesthetic performance and historical fact.

I am left with fifty-nine works written by thirty writers of Alberta fiction, an unmanageable number of books to be studied closely. Some of these novelists, however, choose to avoid specifying their setting and withdraw from even implicit comment on their region. I have chosen either to omit their novels entirely, as in the case of Sheila Mackay Russell's A Lamp is Heavy, or refer to their novels only briefly to clarify my views on regionalism, as in the case of Illia Kiriak's Sons of the Soil. Other novels have been passed over briefly because they are set primarily in places other than Alberta, that is, because they mention Alberta only in passing. In M. Constantin-Weyer's Un Homme se Penche sur son Passé, for instance, the setting is primarily outside Alberta. In this novel and in the novels of Isabel Paterson (who will be given more consideration for reasons to be discussed), very little is said about Alberta even in the scenes which are set there. Very simply, then, one of my principles of selection is to comment upon a novelist in proportion to the amount of interest he has shown in his Alberta setting.

But there are still a dozen or so works of fiction written about Alberta which I will be forced to omit or pass over briefly. I am referring here to popular or escape fiction: regional idylls by E. J. Walker and F. J. Williams,

adventure novels by John Mackie and W. L. Amy, domestic comedies (with an element of the regional idyll) by S. M. Russell and Barbara Villey Cormack. None of these writers has excited much critical attention in any of the major Canadian periodicals and literary journals.[10] Desmond Pacey, in Creative Writing in Canada, explains why. Speaking of the regional idyllists of the fifties (referring to writers such as B. V. Cormack, S. M. Russell and F. J. Williams), he says that their books "neither are nor pretend to be . . . more than light entertainment."[11]

I have not overlooked the above six authors entirely, but I have devoted more attention to the regional idyllists and adventure novelists writing about Alberta between the turn of the century and 1930: Ralph Connor, R. J. C. Stead, Nellie McClung, Isabel Paterson and Arthur Stringer. This is because their impact upon Canadian readers appears to have been sizeably greater than that of their successors. In fact Professors Roper, Beharriel and Schieder have pointed out (LHC, p. 267) that these five earlier novelists have at least a limited claim to being called regional realists. In chapter II I will examine that claim.

What remains in my study is a series of fictions written about some aspect of life in Alberta in the last hundred years or so. From the earliest years of Alberta's history we have seven novels by Ralph Connor. Following close on his heels and contemporary with Connor are

R. J. C. Stead (with four novels), Nellie McClung (with two), Arthur Stringer (with four) and Isabel Paterson (with two). In addition to these there are F. J. Niven's The Flying Years, Lovat Dickson's Out of the Westland and Wilfred Eggleston's The High Plains.

The years 1935-1972 are much more encouraging to the student of literature. It is with the sixteen novels of eleven serious novelists that I will be concerned in the remaining chapters of this study. These writers are Ralph Allen, Henry Kreisel, W. O. Mitchell, Howard O'Hagan, Christine Van der Mark, Edward McCourt, Denis Godfrey, Georges Bugnet, Robert Kroetsch, George Ryga and Herbert Harker.

Thus far in this study I have attempted to outline my approach as a necessary combination of regional scholarship and criticism. The next task in this process is to introduce the terms within which Alberta may be called a region. Here, J. M. S. Careless offers some helpful terms of reference which serve nicely as a starting point for studies of Canadian regions. Careless establishes that "Canada, if one nation [is] eminently divisible."[12] In the opinion of Careless, in the absence of a unified, indivisible feeling of national identity, Canadians can seek to establish other identities, with their region for example. This region may be defined strictly within geographical terms: the

Cypress Hills of the prairie dustbowl region; the vaguely defined pays d'en haut of French Canadian mythology; the Gaspé Peninsula, and many others. This region may be a city, a village, a ghetto or a suburb: Mariposa, St. Urbain Street, Forest Hills or what have you. The region is sometimes defined in terms of a geographically limited block of provinces: the Prairies, the Maritimes; or just as often, regions in Canada are politically designated. These, of course, are the provinces.

One of the more substantially rooted regional allegiances in Canadians has become the provincial allegiances. On this subject Careless has made some important observations, again in the same study cited above.

> In the twentieth century, the growing demands on the government in an industrializing, urbanizing society of course greatly enlarged the activities of the provinces; but, not less significantly, the process strengthened their identification with the particularist societies of Canada. They grew in status as well as in function. It is not only evident that federal-provincial conferences have acquired something of the atmosphere of diplomatic exchanges between states, but it is also not inexpressive of Canadian conditions that heads of powerful provincial regimes may use the title of prime minister for their office--as in the current advance of the kingdom of British Columbia to co-equal dignity (5).

In my own study my first concern will always be to enquire into the possibility of distinct regional impulses. And the regional impulses with which I am primarily concerned are defined in terms of provincially designated regions, the "powerful provincial empires" to which Careless refers.

Still, it would be pretentious not to admit that the

prairie itself is a region, albeit diversified in every way conceivable to history. And it would be equally short-sighted to overlook the many regions within Alberta's boundaries: the arid south-east plain, the foothills, the Rockies, the northern forest, the Peace River valley, etc. This diversity of regions within a region accounts in part for the veritable rainbow of diversity in the mood and tone of Alberta fiction. Compare, for instance, George Ryga's bleak Hungry Hills with W. O. Mitchell's exuberant The Kite. These two novels were published within a year of each other and set within one hundred miles of each other, and yet both novelists are relatively faithful to their respective regions.

Amid such a confusion of regional identities and regional diversities, I have set up certain guidelines. A region is a provincial kingdom, and a sub-region a community within that region. The so-called 'native impulse' in Alberta fiction is just as likely to be a whole mosaic of impulses only slightly different from that of any other western province. And when Alberta regionalism is referred to, I will not treat it as a fact, but at best an emerging phenomenon a long way from maturity. Indeed when one reviews the great literary strides made by such writers as William Faulkner, D. H. Lawrence, Thomas Hardy (and even Canadians like Mordecai Richler) toward the creation of a regional fiction, one despairs of using the term regionalism for Alberta fiction. I will be satisfied, therefore, to comment

upon the modest progress made by Alberta writers over some seven or eight decades. And as well, I will be attempting to ascertain a direct relationship between a writer's faithful rendering of the Alberta scene and his ability as a creative artist. Indeed, if only these two phenomena are adequately charted and commented upon, I will consider this pathfinding expedition worthwhile. I shall now turn to the region and examine it as the sociologist or the historian or the student of any of the environmental sciences would view it.

A major problem in defining regional areas presents itself when, in the case of Alberta for instance, that area is surrounded almost entirely by arbitrary, map-ruled, political boundaries. Do things change, one might ask, when one has crossed the Alberta-Saskatchewan border? Has one really left one region and entered another?

To answer these questions, let us view the problem in another way. Edward McCourt has observed that "To the native of the prairies Alberta is the far West; British Columbia the near East."[13] This is so because a natural boundary divides B.C. and Alberta. Because of this natural boundary (the Rocky Mountains), B.C. was settled from the Pacific coast region; and Alberta, the most westernly region in the territories before the Rockies, was settled (much later then B.C.) from the East. Historically and geographically, therefore, B.C. is a separate region from the

prairies.

But no natural barrier divides Alberta from the North, from the U.S.A., or from Saskatchewan, and thus it is less likely that a region can come into existence because of arbitrary straight lines on a map. But does this mean we are bereft of a meaningful region?

A region is a community which, in terms of geographical or social patterns, may be seen as distinct from the surrounding communities. It is my view that Alberta is socially distinct. My evidence for this view is largely, though not entirely, derived from Alberta's political history since 1920. I would argue that Alberta's distinct social character was manifested with the election of its two non-aligned parties, the U.F.A. (1921-1935), and the Social Credit party (1935-1971). Because the political allegiances of a community are a function of its unique history, geography and social structure, I would argue that there are ample regional disparities between Alberta and its nearest prairie region, Saskatchewan, to claim a regional distinction. The people of Alberta, in responding consistently to a distinct political mandate, have forced the emergence of their region.

The story of this emergence, however, has its roots deep in the years before 1920. The conditions which eventuated in Alberta's two maverick governments began to evolve at least thirty years before Alberta became a province in

1905. First, there was relative peace and order with the arrival of the Mounted Police in the area which is now Southern Alberta, from 1874 to 1885. And even during the rebellion year, the fighting was largely confined east of Frog Lake and largely suppressed within Alberta. The arrival of the railroad in Calgary in 1883 and the passing from the plains of the buffalo (approximately 1881-1884) coincided with Sitting Bull's retreat to the United States.

Years of relative prosperity followed upon the years of peace. The ranching industry, for instance, received a shot in the arm from the unusual demand for beef in the Klondike during the closing years of the century. And as both James McGregor and John Archer claim, farmers found the soil extremely fertile to the north of the ranching country.[14]

I have cited these relatively pleasant conditions because they were a prelude to the unusually fortunate events which followed decades later. In the great depression of the thirties, Alberta was the prairie province least ravaged by drought. Its drought was a financial one which necessitated radical economic solutions. By contrast, Saskatchewan was ravaged by physical drought during those years.

Not that Albertans had an easy time of it during the depression. The very reverse was true, but these people experienced a recovery in the forties unlike that of any province in the dominion. After the oil boom in 1947 and

the subesquent influx of American capital, an augmented American colony, and an industrial, mining, and general population boom, Alberta boasted that it was the richest per capita province in Canada. In spite of formidable municipal debts, Alberta was claimed, until recently, to be the only debt free province in the dominion. There is perhaps no province in Canada where the lure of quick fortunes is felt as thoroughly as it is in Alberta. This pervasive atmosphere of fortune hunting accounts in part for MacGregor's and Archer's sometimes irritating habit of likening their region to an El Dorado.

Related to Alberta's tradition of quick collective (or individual) fortunes is Alberta's maverick political history. Albertans have a reputation for being suspicious of eastern interests. They proved it with their creation of the U.F.A. party; they proved it again with their creation of the Social Credit party which, according to Aberhart, was a force to combat the 'Eastern Conspiracy.' Of course it can not be denied that all western provinces have manifested a suspicion of eastern political motives. But Alberta was the last province to be settled, and among the prairie provinces, the most remote from Ontario. It is not difficult to discern a sense of antipathy toward federal political concerns proportionate with Alberta's geographical distance from the power centres of the East.

Alberta's unique political allegiances appear to

have crystalized between the time of the rise of the U.F.A. party and Aberhart's landslide victory of 1935. A wave of populist sympathies referred to by Richard Allen as the social gospel had been sweeping Canada from a few years before the turn of the century to the early 1920's.[15] These sympathies were largely promoted by Protestant ministers and churchmen and rooted in Protestant ethics, but they eventuated in collectivist organizations. One such organization, which had more than a taste of methodism in it, was Saskatchewan's C.C.F. party. The collectivist spirit and its political manifestations in Saskatchewan were largely the dirt farmers' response to the physical and financial drought of the thirties.

But in Alberta conditions were different. First, the province was settled by a larger proportion of people who belonged to (or joined) evangelical sects and cults. In Saskatchewan the nationally aligned churches, established Protestant denominations, seemed to dominate. Secondly, while the financial drought was general across the province, the physical drought was totally destructive only in the southeast corner of the province and scattered areas north of there. Thirdly, while the depression raged like a series of biblical plagues in scattered parts of Alberta, the people's regional heritage militated strongly against anything which smacked of socialism. This heritage was kept alive by the large number of expectant capitalists who had in various

ways inherited Alberta's El Dorado mythology: the thousands of unsuccessful Klondikers who settled in and around Edmonton, and their progeny; the thousands of Southern Alberta ranchers whose very life style was the embodiment of independence and romantic individualism; the dirt farmers who, in so many cases, were able to harvest a crop during the drought years.

What Richard Allen would describe as a fundamentalist reaction to the social gospel (which in Saskatchewan had been so successful politically) was just as likely the expectant capitalists' reaction to creeping socialism. In either case, the receptacle for Alberta's economic and religious eccentricities was eventually William Aberhart. He was the radio Messiah to the weary and heavy laden as we see in Robert Kroetsch's novel The Words of My Roaring (1966). He was the enemy of the usurer but the friend of the independent commodity producer like R. J. C. Stead's fictional hero of Dennison Grant (1920).

It is not a difficult task to demonstrate Alberta's political individuality and the social forces behind its political masks. Nowhere in Canada had two consecutive non-aligned parties been able to seize power in a province as the U.F.A. and the Social Credit party had done in 1921 and 1935. Nowhere in Canada had such vacillations between left and right been so much in evidence in so short a time. Both the U.F.A. and the Social Credit parties had begun as radical

populist alternatives to the federally represented parties. Both, by the end of their tenure (1935 and 1971), were ultra-conservative governments.

Albertans had scarcely any radical tradition, be it socialist, collectivist, revolutionary or whatever: no Louis Riels as Manitobans had; a relatively weak tradition of collectivism unlike that of, say, the Saskatchewan farmers. In 1943, when Manning took over the premiership, his election victories were founded on the fight against socialism as much as on the fight for Social Credit. The present government in Alberta is Conservative. The provincial governments on either side of Alberta are both N.D.P. It is neither quackery nor clairvoyancy to say that no province in the dominion is more securely in the hands of the Conservatives (both federally and provincially); which is to say, in Alberta, safer from the seductions of socialism. It is true that in the elections of 1921 and 1935 one witnessed the banding together of the oppressed little man against the money interests of the 'Eastern Conspiracy' (real or imaginary). It is true as well that in Alberta's unique system of delegate democracy (under Greenfield) and plebiscitarian democracy (under Aberhart) one witnessed a radical espousal of the one party system. And it is true that both the U.F.A. and the Social Credit governments maintained that they were run directly by the mass desire of the people.

But Fortune has endowed Alberta with enough

prosperity to allow it to perpetrate a romantic myth. To the fundamentalist it announces itself in the imagery of the Promised Land. To the expectant capitalist it seeks expression in treasure hunt narratives. To the tourist or the outdoorsman it finds its romantic backdrop in the northern forests or the Rockies. It should be noted that the basis for three romantic myths are suggested here, and that these myths are far from compatible. Such are the historical paradoxes of a province the economy and social structure of which have been accelerated at an unusually rapid rate from a pastoral to an urbanized condition.

The Saskatchewan populace during the thirties were able to embrace collectivism and socialism and reject Social Credit. This is consistent with their regionally dictated survival mythology. And the Alberta populace was able to embrace Social Credit (via the optimistic monetary reformers' theorizing) and reject socialism. This is consistent with their regionally dictated El Dorado mythology. Regarding these contrasting provincial mythologies, Edward McCourt, in his cultural study of Saskatchewan, is in agreement. "The Saskatchewan man has thus been shaped by a sterner physical environment than that of most Canadians. Having been compelled to adapt himself to that environment, he has made his own rules for survival and looks with suspicion on traditional values cherished in softer lands. He tends to take a less optimistic view of life than do his neighbours,

particularly those who live in Alberta."[16]

Northrop Frye, although he does not restrict his remarks to Alberta, speaks of the Messianic religious tendencies there. "Adolescent dreams of glory haunt the Canadian consciousness (and unconciousness), some naive and some sophisticated. In the naive area are the predictions that the twentieth century belongs to Canada, that our cities will become much bigger than they ought to be, or, like Edmonton . . . 'gateways' to somewhere else, reconstructed Northwest passages. The more sophisticated usually take the form of a Messianic complex about Canadian culture, for Canadian culture, no less than Alberta, has always been 'next year country.'"[17] Alberta would be, from Frye's point of view, a Canadian microcosm which represents Canada's boundless confidence in its own future, and represents it in the naivest--therefore sharpest--outlines.

It was mentioned that the emergent Alberta myth seems to have something to do with turning the pristine wilderness into a prosperous Promised Land. It is amusing to see this belief come out naively in the popular literature of the oil-boom days.

> 1) . . . today I saw a buck deer watch with placid, unconcerned liquid eyes, as an oil derrick was being erected nearby. He stood in the edge of a thicket, his colours blending perfectly with the foliage--as still as a statue. A red squirrel scurried up the trunk of a tree. Two crows scolded furiously, for I had penetrated too closely to their sacred domain. A porcupine waddled unconcernedly down the path. The old pulsating beat of life was all about me.

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> I felt proud--and awed--and with the greater wisdom that had been its gift to me, I echoed little Mike's words: 'I am an Albertan.'[18]
>
> 2) The oil boom, bigger now than even the prophets dreamed, planted the derricks that blossom against the skyline.[19]

Both of these quotations, by different authors, are naive expressions of the Alberta popular imagination which aspires in countless fictions to the illusion of an unmolested, natural Eden blossoming with forests and oil derricks, festooned with bull market ticker tape. This is surely one of the basic paradoxes of the Alberta character.

During the Manning administration, which began just before the great oil strike at Leduc and ended with his retirement at the peak of Alberta prosperity in 1968, the primary reason the Social Credit party remained in power as long as it did was this unheard of wealth. So in a sense, Alberta manifested its political uniqueness because, especially in the thirties, it was socially and economically unique among prairie provinces. But it maintained its politically unique status because it could afford such eccentric political tastes. In a sense, Alberta's bumper crops, its cattle, its coal and other minerals, and especially its oil and gas, were the fulfillment of the Moses-like prophesies of Aberhart and Manning. The dream had always been there, or at least since the lure of the Klondike in 1898, which in part put the province of Alberta and the city of Edmonton on the map. Alberta's provincial emblem may be the

wild rose, but its flagpole is the oil derrick.

If one were to isolate Alberta's regional qualities, as I have briefly done,[20] one might logically begin with its unusual political history. He would isolate such regional terms as 'delegate democracy' (from the U.F.A. years), 'plebiscitarian democracy' (from the early Social Credit years), and visionary pragmatism (my own term for the political styles of both Aberhart and Manning). But such a search could only begin in political territory. It would necessarily terminate in geographical and geological territory. At the outset of this regional discussion, it was maintained that Alberta was a region because it was socially and politically distinct. But, as the above conclusion states, its fundamentalist brand of politics could not have flourished without the help of the vast natural resources which have been tapped in recent years. Ultimately, then, it is best to view these human and physical features as mutually influential in creating the region we now know as Alberta.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Notes

1 "Regionalism in American Literature," Regionalism in America, ed. Merrill Jensen (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1951), p. 257.

2 Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1965.

3 Introduction to Martha Ostenso, Wild Geese, rpt. (1925; Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961), pp. v-vii.

4 "Poetry and Prose from Alberta," Canadian Author and and Bookman, 19 (1943), p. 23.

5 "Alberta in Books," Canadian Library Association Bulletin, 8 (1952), p. 160.

6 "Conclusion," Literary History of Canada, ed. Carl F. Klinck et al (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), pp. 848-849; hereafter cited as LHC. Further citations from LHC are from this edition.

7 Alberta (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), p. 6.

8 James G. MacGregor, A History of Alberta (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1972), pp. 289-290.

9 The Complete Works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, ed. George Parsons Lathrop (Boston: Houghton Mifflin and Company, 1899), X, pp. 456-457.

10 I searched the Canadian Periodicals Index from 1930-1960 for journals and periodicals contemporary to these six authors. No studies on their work have been published.

11 2nd ed. (Toronto: Ryerson, 1961), p. 253.

12 "Limited Identities in Canada," Canadian Historical Review, 50, No. 1 (1969), pp. 1-10.

13 The Canadian West in Fiction (Toronto: Ryerson, 1949), p. vi.

14 A History of Alberta, pp. 290-291, and John Archer, Intro. to John H. Blackburn, Land of Promise (Toronto: U.T., 1971).

15 Richard Allen, The Social Passion (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1971).

16 Edward A. McCourt, Saskatchewan (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), p. 7.

17 LHC, p. 827.

18 J. P. Gillese ed., Chinook Arch (Edmonton: The Government of the Province of Alberta, 1967), p. 345; italics are mine.

19 W. G. Hardy ed., Alberta Golden Jubilee Anthology (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1955), p. 284; italics are mine.

20 The following historical studies were of much use in helping me sketch in the history of Alberta, although the conclusions and inferences made are, to a large extent, my own: W. E. Mann, Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959); James Gray, The Winter Years (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966); C. B. MacPherson, Democracy in Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1953); J. A. Irving, The Social Credit Movement in Alberta (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959); as well as studies already cited by J. M. S. Careless, Edward McCourt, J. G. MacGregor, Richard Allen, and Robert Kroetsch.

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNINGS

In Chapter I, I stressed that a region's literature is born when its people have come to terms with their region. This literature is the articulation of those terms, and this articulation is the final stage of a process in which a writer engages matters of universal concern by particularizing them with the accurately observed details of his own region. This whole process is dealt with in detail by Benjamin Spencer (Regionalism in America). Regionalism is an expression ". . . of a region, not merely about it" (254). "Regionalism as it is conceived and practiced by its more thoughtful exponents, one may confidently suppose, is not an evanescent enthusiasm soon to fade as a forced and premature growth in American letters. In accordance with its own principle, as it were, its roots are in native soil, and through a century of maturation it has been shaped by the mental climate and physical structure of the country. Although it has been fertilized by foreign techniques, it is not . . . a transplanted exotic" (254). A regional literature must be developed over generations, Spencer insists. "The regional writer . . . is one to the country born, of the second or

third generation . . . . Authentic regional expression is a matter of living and of absorbing landscape and character into the unconscious" (255).

Spencer cites Faulkner as a regional writer who has brought this process to maturity. "Faulkner's imagination, a sensitively organic product of the land which it reports, in its thorough embrace of the region past and present has also comprehended much of the universal, 'pregnant with values,' which . . . springs from the specific fact." To attain "the universal mind" a regional writer "must 'pass through the discipline . . . of common things near at hand . . . of influences the most accidental'" (255). The "regional principle, if it is not to breed provincialism, must be corrected and sublimated by some 'supra-political culture' such as the classical-Christian tradition" (256).

Randall Stewart is apparently in agreement with Spencer on how a regional literature unfolds. He demonstrates how great regionalists both particularize their own regions and uncover among the particulars that which transcends the region. For example, "It would appear, then, that the best New England writers have stayed home and that their knowledge of the cultures of other lands and ages has been of value to them chiefly as it has helped them to understand their own inheritance and has sharpened their perceptions of the home-bred virtues and the home-felt scenes. The paradox of such a provincialism is that it achieves, without

deliberately setting out to do so, the real thing in universality."[1]

In this chapter the fiction of eight Alberta novelists, writing from the turn of the century to the second great war, will be considered. In LHC, which contains the most recent major studies of early fiction writers in Canada, seven of these were lauded as being among the ground breakers of Canadian regionalism: Ralph Connor (324), Isabel Paterson (299), Nellie McClung (331), R. J. C. Stead (299), Arthur Stringer (299), F. J. Niven (664) and Wilfrid Eggleston (683). The other writer of the eight is Lovat Dickson, whom I have included because he seems to typify in his fiction most of the outstanding tendencies of his seven contemporaries. Of the first seven writers, one of the scholars who compiled the studies in LHC said the following: "What did distinguish their work, as a body, was the remarkable extent to which they used their own native grounds as material in their stories" (312).[2] Arthur Stringer and R. J. C. Stead were "liberated by the work of earlier British and American realists" (LHC, p. 276). And if the fiction of Isabel Paterson, Nellie McClung, Ralph Connor and Wilfrid Eggleston is not specifically linked, in LHC, with schools of realism, it is praised for its "faithful" or "able" or "authentic" portraits of Alberta life.[3]

It is this claim that these writers were liberated by realism, or faithful portrayers of their region, that I will take up in this chapter. To use Spencer's phrase, these writers do not appear to have "passed through the discipline of common things near at hand." It should become apparent that they tended to write not of what was around them, but of what they wanted to see around them.

All eight of the early writers, in most of their fictions, approach characterization with two related tendencies at work: to idealize the 'best' kind of people within the terms of their moral universe; and to villanize, or consign to inferior categories, the 'worst' examples of humanity. Both tendencies reflect the imported preconceptions of the writers who came to early Alberta rather than the regional subjects whom they attempted, with scant success, to portray.

Ralph Connor (1860-1937) had relatively little difficulty in capturing the flavour of his Ontario boyhood haunts. A sketch like the one below readily evinces Connor's feeling for and his eclectic knowledge of the Ontario of his youth.

> Straight north from the St. Lawrence runs the road through the Indian Lands. At first its way lies through open country, from which the forest has been driven far back to the horizon on either side, for along the great river these many years villages have clustered, with open fields about them stretching far away. But when once the road leaves the Front, with its towns and villages and open fields and passes beyond Marintown

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> and over the North Branch, it reaches a country where the forest is more a feature of the landscape. And when some dozen or more of the crossroads marking the concessions which lead off to east and west have been passed, the road seems to strike into a different world. The forest loses its conquered appearance, and dominates everything. There is forest everywhere. It lines up close and thick along the road, and here and there quite overshadows it. It crowds in upon the little farms and shuts them off from one another and from the world outside, and peers in through the little windows of the log houses looking so small and lonely, but so beautiful in their forest frames.[4]

The quotation is from The Man from Glengarry (1901), Connor's most well received book in the eyes of the critics.[5] In this book and in Glengarry School Days (1902), Connor is at his best. Both are Canadian classics, and it is generally agreed by the same critics that Connor had a native's feeling for his terrain and for the people living there who nurtured his imagination. One notes his readiness to specify details, those of the shifting character of the forest for example. This capacity for specifics marks him as a fine Ontario regionalist. And his sketches of people like Donald Bhain MacDonald, Frances St. Clair, and MacDonald Dubh have never been adversely criticized by literary reviewers. They are fine sketches.

But Connor came to Alberta. In the following description, from Sky Pilot (1899), Connor seems to be imposing the terrain of his beloved Ontario just as so many early eastern painters did in coming west. Here is one of Connor's first attempts at sketching Alberta's foothills.

> Trees of many kinds deepened the shadows of the canyon. Over us waved the big elms that grew up here and there out of the bottom, and around their feet clustered low cedars and hemlocks and balsams, while the sturdy, rugged oaks and delicate, trembling poplars clung to the rocky sides and clambered up and out to the canyon's sunny lips. Back of all, the great black rocks, decked with mossy bits and clinging things, glistened cool and moist between the parting trees. From many an oozy rook the dainty clematis and columbine shook out their bells, and, lower down, the beds of many-colored moss the late wind-flower and maidenhair and tiny violet lifted up brave, sweet faces.6

There is no maiden hair native to Alberta, and columbine are found only in the Alberta Rockies, not in the foothills or the western prairie where Sky Pilot takes place (Cochrane actually).[7] There are no oaks, elms or cedars growing wild in Alberta.[8]

Connor was bound to improve. In his penultimate Alberta book, The Major (1917), he is at least capable of capturing some of the authentic physical details. Still, he gushes and gilds to an uncomfortable degree.

> A September day in Alberta. There is no other day to be compared to it in any other month or in any other land. Other lands have their September days, and Alberta has days in other months, but the combination of September day in Alberta is sui generis. The foothill country with plain, and hill, and valley, and mighty mountains, laced with stream, and river, and lake; the overarching sheet of blue with cloud shapes wandering and wistful, the kindly sun pouring its genial sheen of yellow and gold over the face of the earth below, purple in the mountains and gold and pearly grey, and all swimming in air blown through the mountain gorges and over forests of pine, tingling with ozone and reaching the heart and going to the head like new wine -- these things go with a September day in Alberta.9

The landscape never was discovered and articulated except as an extension of tourist-like sentiments bred in the East. It remained an impenetrable mystery. Women too in Connor's novels, were fictive constructs arising from this same tendency to sentimentalize at some distance from the facts. Here is a typical example of one of Connor's women taken from The Doctor (1906).

> . . . a girl swinging a milk pail in her hand turned into the mill lane. As she stepped from the glare and the dust of the highroad into the lane, it seemed as if Nature had been waiting to find in her the touch that makes perfect; so truly, in all her fresh daintiness, did she seem a bit of that shady lane with its fragrance and its fresh beauty.
>
> It had taken sixteen years of wholesome country life to round that supple form into its firm lines of grace, and to tint those moulded cheeks with the dainty bloom that seemed a reflection from the thistle heads that nodded at her through the snake fence. It had taken sixteen years of pure-hearted joyous living to lend those eyes, azure as the sky above, their brave, clear glance; sixteen years of unsullied maidenhood to endow her with that divine something of mystery which, with its shy reserve and fearless trust, awakens reverence and rebukes impurity as with the vision of God.
>
> Her sunbonnet, fallen back from her yellow hair, shining golden in the sun, revealed a face strong, brave and kind, with just a touch of pride. The pride showed most, however, in the poise of her head and the carriage of her shoulders. But when the mobile lips parted in a smile over the straight rows of white teeth . . .10

The description carries on in this vein of heightened chastity for several pages. Not even James Joyce, in his riotous parody of Gerty McDowell in Ulysses (the "Nausicaa" episode), releases such waves of sentimentality. The only time the word 'passion' exists for Connor is when one man is moved to admire another. In Corporal Cameron (1912), Tim

(from a prairie farm) and Rob (from Scotland) both have a passion for Cameron primarily because of his athletic prowess. And a more pronounced, physical passion exists between Dick and Barney Boyle in The Doctor. Barney's farewell from the desperado, Mexico, is equally passionate; and Hughie Murray has similarly intense feelings for Ronald Dubh in The Man from Glengarry. This mateship, quasi-homosexual ethic among Connor's muscular Christians is sometimes quite explicit in passages like the following, from The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land (1919):

> High on a rock, poised like a bird for flight, stark naked, his satin skin shining like gold and silver in the rising sun, stood a youth, tall, slim of body, not fully developed but with muscles promising, in their faultless, gently swelling outline, strength and suppleness to an unusual degree . . . .
>
> 'What a pose! What an Apollo! he [an onlooker who has just arrived, unknowlingly, on the scene] muttered.
>
> The sunlight glistening on the beautiful white skin lay like pools of gold in the curving hollows of the perfectly modelled body, and ran like silver over the rounded swellings of the limbs . . . .
>
> 'Oh Lord! What lines!' he breathed.
>
> Slowly the youth began to move his arms up to the horizontal then to the perpendicular, reaching to the utmost of his height upon his toe tips breathing deep the while. Smoothly, slowly, the muscles in legs and thighs, in back, in abdomen, in chest, responding to the exercise moved under the lustrous skin as if themselves were living things . . . .
>
> 'Ye gods of Greece!' breathed the man. 'What is this thing I see? Flesh or spirit? Man or god?' Again he swore at himself for neglecting to bring his sketch book and pencil.11

The above is a scene from Connor's last Alberta book, a land where men "dwelt safe from the scanning of the world, freed from all restraints of social law, denied the gentler

influences of home and the sweet uplift of a good woman's face." It is particularly interesting and amusing to see what in fact does happen when this all-male paradise is invaded by the "sweet uplift of a good woman's face." Here is the scene immediately following the erotic sight of the naked boy by the man watching. "'Hello Father! Where are you?' A girl's voice rang out, high, clear, and near at hand. 'Good Lord!' said the man to himself, glancing up at the poised figure. 'I must stop her'" (10).

This scene unconsciously exposes some of Connor's ideas on love between (and among) the sexes. Rarely, if ever, does Connor confront the subject of normal sexual relationships. The Gwen of Sky Pilot, Connor insists, is sexless. Arthur Moore, its protagonist and Gwen's saviour, dies a celibate. Shock MacGregor chooses his preaching work over his beloved Helen Fairbanks, and the two never marry in The Prospector. In The Major, Larry Gwynne finally marries Jane Brown, but only at the end of the novel. The same arrangement concludes Corporal Cameron, thus disposing in these last two novels,of any necessity to discuss the marital relationship. Both Dick Boyle (The Doctor) and Barry Dunbar (The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land) die before their respective loves can be consummated. Even in his own autobiography, Connor says nothing of his married life. But he dwells at length on his mother who was the source of his inspiration,

the model upon whom almost all of his women were drawn, and the first and greatest saint in his life.[12]

History had been made in a spectacular way in the Northwest a decade before Ralph Connor came to Alberta. However this proximity in time to the events of the Riel risings seems to have impeded Connor in recounting these events with any objectivity. He devoted two Alberta novels to the subject: Corporal Cameron (1912) and Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail (1914). One important excerpt from this pair of fictions (the second is sequel to the first) should allow Connor's views on Alberta society (specifically the Métis-Indian-white clash) to speak for themselves. In the following scene, Raven, an English remittance man turned outlaw, rejoins the English forces against Riel and dies because of his switch of allegiance, but dies a hero's death. Here Raven clearly appears, because of Connor's often publicized WASP sympathies, to speak for Connor himself.[13]

"'. . . say to the Superintendent I was in the straight with him, with you all, with my country in this rebellion business. I heard about this raid and I fancy I have rather spoiled their pemmican. I have run some cattle in my time, but you know, Cameron, a fellow who had worn the uniform could not mix in with these beastly breeds against the Queen, God bless her!'"[14]

This two-novel series is an application of two popular formulae used in writing regional idylls and historical romances in Connor's time: the outdoor adventure perfected by men like Zane Grey, and the historical romance, best exemplified by the novels of Gilbert Parker. Corporal Cameron fits nicely into both of these classes of popular fiction, for he punches, shoots and rides his way through the Riel uprising, actually preventing its spread in Alberta; these come across like debased versions of Zane Grey adventures. W. A. Fraser, in his collection of short stories (Bulldog Carney, 1919), is far more skillful in this type of writing. Cameron preaches most of the popular beliefs of the hero of historical romance. In Connor's case, these beliefs were extremely evangelical Ontario-Orange to the point of racist tendencies (the followers of Riel were "a lot of bally savages").

My judgements of Connor have been unrelentingly harsh. And a man should be judged by his best work; so if I have made my point, Connor's seven Alberta novels comprise the worst half of his work. There are some minor victories: some of his action scenes, especially the sporting events, fights, and cattle round-ups; and a few of his local color touches, characters like Bronco Bill and Hi Kendall, both of Sky Pilot. Compared to his Alberta contemporary Luke Allan, for instance, Connor can be classed as a more successful local

colorist. Allan (and W. A. Fraser as well) merely imposed most of the props and trappings of the American western on the Alberta region. The result is a rather bogus series of shoot-outs, showdowns and ambushes which have little or no historical foundation in the Alberta of the early 1900's. In his earliest Alberta fiction, Connor was astute enough to avoid the 'western' formula.

Like a great many Alberta writers who followed Connor, he subscribed to the idea that Alberta was the perfect setting for happy endings, and was later to be referred to by many as the Promised Land. He populated this Promised Land with his heroic sterotypes and his popular success was considerable. Perhaps, as the LHC scholars have noted, he gained his enormous following because he was the first Alberta writer (and one of the first Canadian writers) to incorporate the heroic stereotypes of the territory into his books. He gave his eastern audiences the mountie (Corporal Cameron from Patrol), the preacher (many of these), the remittance man ('The Duke' from Sky Pilot and Raven from Corporal Cameron), the Indian (Little Thunder from Corporal Cameron), the Métis (Louis the Breed from Corporal Cameron), the cowboy (Bronco Bill from Sky Pilot), and the soldier (several from The Major). Some of these stereotypes are parodied in Robert Kroetsch's Studhorse Man, but in Connor's time they served only to confirm shallow preconceptions about life in early Alberta.

Nellie McClung (1873-1951) knew Ralph Connor and worked with him on temperance crusades and church issues throughout Canada. She shared his crusading zeal and fought for abstinence and conventional Protestant morality most of her life. And she was preoccupied with the problems peculiar to her sex, whereas Connor seemed to dwell innocently apart from the female sex throughout his writing career.

Her first Alberta novel was When Christmas Crossed the Peace (1923) and concerns a virtuous, crusading heroine, typical of nearly all McClung's heroines. In this story (quite similar to the more celebrated Pearl Watson stories) Nurse Downey makes fools of her drunken male adversaries and rounds up all the sin in Peace River. This she does disguised as the police sergeant whom she eventually marries. The sergeant has broken his leg, but is presumably able at least to walk down the aisle with his formidable bride under his own steam.

Ms. McClung's second Alberta novel, Painted Fires (1925), is more convincing than most of her early fictions. That is, because in this later novel she attempts to examine in detail the injustices encountered by innocent women in a man's world, the sense of felt life is stronger than it is in novels like Purple Springs or When Christmas Crossed the Peace. The novel is about a young Finnish girl named Helmi who, because of a visit from her vivacious Aunt Lili, is tempted over to America with romantic dreams of an easy life with

beautiful clothes and a rich husband. But when she arrives in America she finds her aunt aging, deceived by a villanous rake, and ill beyond recovery. After Aunt Lili dies, Helmi is forced to flee Winnipeg. She wonders at the time "if one kept going, going, going, would every disagreeable thing fall away, every sin and every sadness?"[15] But her ticket takes her only as far as the Rockies in Eagle Mines, Alberta. There she must somehow learn to cope with her surroundings. They do not entirely agree with her, but she meets Jack Doran there, falls in love with him and marries him. However Jack has a friend who knows of some gold and oil deposits, and the two of them aspire to go north and gain the fortunes that Helmi, since her marriage, has rejected as false, "painted fires." Fortune turns again and Helmi's past catches up with her. Jack discovers that she was implicated in a raid on an opium den and had fled the authorities who (unknown to Jack) wrongly accused her of being involved with drugs. Jack leaves her, disenchanted, in search of a quick fortune, and their communications break down. Helmi, now pregnant by her husband, is set adrift from all that she had loved. The man to initiate her bad fortune is Magistrate J. Edgerton Blackwood, a drinker among other things. At her lowest ebb, Helmi is seized with a desire for revenge against this "dirty, miserable old soak" who has ruined her life. She goes to his house to shoot him, but just as she is about to pull the trigger,

Blackwood is struck by lightning and killed (in the act of drinking liquor, one should notice). "Then the soul of Helmi was born anew in thankfulness to God, and in a faith of His goodness that never again wavered, for God had saved her from sin. God had intervened to save her when her heart was farthest from Him. God was her friend. He loved her -- He would not let her sin! With His own arm He had saved her "(300).

There are many scenes in this book which are reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's Tess of the D'Urbervilles (as well as some which evoke Hawthorne's The Scarlet Letter). Both Tess and Helmi, undone by men they love and men they hate, witness animals suffering at the depths of their despair. Tess sees a wounded pheasant; Helmi sees an old dog. And during these moments both are reminded of the universality of suffering among the innocent, Tess in a thicket, Helmi in a cave. In another similar setting in both novels, the first night after the marriage of both heroines, the ugly past is brought to light. And of course, both heroines similarly set out to destroy the men who have, by one means or another, undone them. Tess succeeds, and because she is always victimized by an uncaring Fate, is destroyed for it. Helmi is spared murdering her undoer, however, in the scene quoted above. Fate, in Helmi's case, becomes a remarkably benevolent deus ex machina.

Throughout almost all of Ms. McClung's writing one senses in her characters a yearning for a Promised Land (like Ralph Connor's) in which Fate, whether in its civilized or its wilderness manifestations, is benevolent to innocent sufferers. Pearl Watson gives us a good example of these many yearnings in Purple Springs (a Manitoba novel except for the idyllic sequence in chapter XX which takes place in and slightly north of northern Alberta).

> Something in Pearl's heart cried out at the injustice of this. It was not fair! All at once she wanted to talk about it to-- some one, to everybody. It was a a mistaken way of looking at life, she thought; the world, as God made it, was a great, beautiful place, with enough of everything to go around. There is enough land-- enough coal-- enough oil. Enough pleasure and beauty, enough music and fun and good times! What had happened was that some had taken more than their share, and that was why others had to go short, and the strange part of it all was that the hoggish ones were the exalted ones, to whom many bowed, and they-- some of them-- were scornful of the people who were still working-- though if every one stopped working, the world would soon be starving (72).

Seven years before this novel had been published, Nellie McClung had been living in Alberta and did so intermittently until the fifties. Many Albertans were seeking solutions, like those aspired to by Pearl, in the years leading up to the Social Credit governments (as I demonstrated in Chapter I). In Painted Fires there are a few scenes, like the one below, which would indicate that Ms. McClung had found the domestic, social and wilderness paradise of her earlier yearnings in which Fate was indeed benevolent.

> Jack put his hand on Helmi's shoulder and drew her to him. 'I think you should let me kiss you now, Helmi,-- just once-- I have never kissed you-- or any other girl.'
>
> Aunt Lili's warnings were all forgotten when Jack's arms tightened around her. The river, under two feet of ice, was singing its old song; the sky was still luminous with the fires of sunset; the clouds had risen to form a Chinook arch, faintly green against the blue; already the western breezes were soft as velvet as they went past the eaves, murmuring something very sweet and satisfying, in which disappointment and heartbreak had no place at all (150).

And Ms. McClung's river, sky and wind are in agreement with Helmi's sentiments. In the above passage, McClung is sentimentalizing nature. In the following passage, in order that the Alberta terrain might be compatible with her very domestic sensibility, she domesticizes nature. I have italicized her domestic imagery.

> When the train slowed its pace above the Eagle Mines, Helmi looked down on a valley which lay *like a shallow saucer, broken jaggedly but fairly down the middle* by the river, which ran jade green and foaming to the plains beyond. *The rim of the saucer* was fluted by short lines of young evergreens running down toward the centre. The mines, three of them, looked like badger-holes of giant size, and were marked by long mounds of slag.
>
> To the west rose the mountains, green at the foot where the forests grew, gravelly and bare above the timber-line, rising still higher into hard gray rock, *seamed across like faded rag carpet*, and at the very top *an icing of snow which had run down the crevices as if it had been put on too soft by unskilled hands* . . . . The bottom of the saucer, on both sides of the river, is a fertile plain of deep black loam, which in summer is covered with heavy grass and pea-vine, but with never a cow to eat it, for the miners are not given to domesticity (125-126).

McClung's imposition of sentimental and domestic imagery upon the wild Alberta terrain of the coal branch area often contrasts sharply with her pictures of town life in *Painted Fires*. Seeing the town, "Helmi shuddered

with the ugliness of it all" (131). And a little later, "The coming of Spring with all its beauty brought no improvement in the littered yards, where the condensed milk tins mounted higher and higher. Blinds still hung crooked, boards in the verandahs were still broken" (133). Often she looks up to the mountains for relief from this rubble, knowing that man could never change them (131 and 137, for instance). When she is completely disenchanted with civilization, like Howard O'Hagan's Tay John, she desires to be buried beneath the snow (222).

Helmi's disdain for her surroundings (the mines, most of the miners, the mining town) is accompanied by her respect for gentlemen with breeding and manners, in other words, for men from the east. The two heroes of the story, Arthur Warner and Jack Doran, are the best examples. "Young Jack Doran, who washed before each meal, flinging the water out of the basin with a circling motion, always looked so clean and fresh when he came in that Helmi could not refrain from looking at him . . . . His face shone out so clear among the grimy faces around the table, and though he called her 'Finn-girl' it never sounded fresh" (135-136). But she is victimized by and looks down upon the Chinese (273). In a novel which is directed against prejudice, Helmi's ethnic allegiances are somewhat disconcerting.

Ms. McClung's probings into the hearts of men and women in conflict and into the distinguishing characteristics

of her region have been largely dominated and distorted by her naive optimism, an optimism based on a conventional crusading morality. Therefore her Tess (Helmi) must not be a fallen woman. She must be married. And she must be rewarded, for in Ms. McClung's scheme of things, tragedy is impossible if the Victorian virtues of pre-marital chastity, abstinence, cleanliness and hard work are upheld. One of the socially significant symbols with which Ms. McClung worked was prosperity. This prosperity eventually comes to Helmi and Jack once they are re-united. Because of a vein of anthracite Helmi has discovered, the couple become mine owners and live happily "as long as grass grows in the valley, and water runs in the English River" (334).

It is interesting to note that Ms. McClung, perhaps adventitiously, has isolated some themes which will rest with us throughout Alberta literature. The first theme is the escape or flight theme. In many more modern Alberta novels, as in Painted Fires, the fleeing, often romantic escapee finds his progress and his attention arrested by the foothills or the Rockies, and so he stops fleeing. He believes, at least temporarily, that he has found paradise; if not, he often heads for the riches of the North. The second theme is the 'painted fires' or lure of easy riches theme. They are there in the Alberta wilderness to be reaped, but they lead, almost invariably, to tragic consequences. Another important theme

arises from the second: the conflict which takes shape between the spiritual impulse to appreciate the Edenic beauties of the province and the commerical impulse to harvest and civilize this garden. Nature is benevolent especially if it yields up its anthracite without yielding up its beauty. Ms. McClung is sometimes illogical about this conflict. She would like to preserve the beauty of the natural terrain even after it has turned into a series of strip mines, so she simply averts her eyes from the mines to the mountains or to the prosperity that the mines yield for Helmi and Jack. Future Alberta writers are more perceptive on this theme than Ms. McClung. Let us now turn to the four Alberta novels of R. J. C. Stead.

The fictional works of R. J. C. Stead (1880-1959) have been evaluated by Professor A. Elder who has dubbed the entire canon a "duo-regional historical panorama" of Canadian settlement in the West.[16] The two regions are Manitoba and Alberta, the latter confined mostly to the foothills region. Even without the help of Professor Elder's judicious appraisal, it is obvious that Stead wrote best (though not always perceptively) about Manitoba. He never quite came to terms with Alberta, as we shall see, except in one heavily qualified exception, Dennison Grant (1920).

First I will look briefly at the three earlier novels: The Bail Jumper (1914), The Homesteaders (1916), and The Cow Puncher (1918). Stead's protagonist in The Bail Jumper

goes west on the railway, and this trip triggers a key observation underlying Stead's approach to the regions he writes of. "The two slender threads of steel seemed the only connecting link with modern civilization, and as they strung far into the endless West the very minds of the passengers underwent an evolution, a broadening, a disassociation with Established Things, and assumed an attitude of receptiveness toward That Which Shall Be.[17]

This "disassociation with Established Things" is perhaps the basis of Stead's artistic problems as an Alberta writer. He, like Connor, could only write convincingly about one region, his Manitoba region (the 'Plainville' of most of his novels). It is generally recognized that Grain (a Manitoba novel) is his closest approach to realism. And it is more than coincidental that Stead's Manitoba was an established region. Stead found Alberta a far too baffling and inadequate subject for his interest in fiction. Another quotation from The Bail Jumper serves to indicate the kind of impact that Alberta had on Stead's mind. Stead's protagonist, now in Alberta, is listening to the tales of his neighbours for the first time since he left Manitoba.

> . . . he sat before the wood fire and felt his young frame thrill as he listened to tales of adventure in the shanties of the Madawaska - tales of the river drive and the faction-fight, of the cry of the wolverine by lonely moonlit shores and the weird romances of loup-garou and windigo. How he thrilled with a deep wonder of the mystery of the untrod path which lay before him, leading into the far, strange fields of manhood, where he too should do great deeds and win great victories and fear nothing (271-272; italics are mine).

I stress the word 'romance' in this passage because what inflamed the protagonist's imagination in the above passage became a fixation with Stead himself for the rest of his life. And so Stead wrote countless verse romances about "the mystery of the untrod path" which was the Alberta he first encountered. Manitoba, already settled, fought over, and socially distinct, was ready for a novelist's attention. Alberta, a lonely hinterland, had no rooted society around which a novelist might begin an intensive study of manners. So when Stead writes his verse narratives in the tradition of Robert Service or Rudyard Kipling, men he admired greatly, he is working within a tenable genre. But when he attempts to write novels of this same country, they collapse embarrassingly into melodrama or dull editorializing. The plots of both The Bail Jumper and The Homesteaders are resolved by third-rate courtroom dramas. The plot of The Cow Puncher (1918) is a tragic version of the same kind of melodrama. The only sustained, memorable scene in any of these novels is from The Homesteaders, part of the Manitoba sequence (chapter V) in which the psychological effects of isolation are rendered with telling realism.

In many ways, Stead is similar to Connor and McClung. Like both of them, he often endulged in a weakness for natural description and excelled in describing prairie rain storms. But all critics would agree that Martha Ostenso and F. P. Grove, both Stead's contemporaries, were far better nature

poets.[18] His views on the coming of civilization are tainted by ideas of Anglo-Saxon superiority and royalist sympathies. He is racist in his views, which perhaps explains why his slimiest villain, Drazk, from Dennison Grant, is Slavic. Here is a more blatant example of Stead's racism. "Dave pressed a button, and a Chinese boy (all male Chinese are boys) entered, bowing in that deference which is so potent to separate the white man from his silver. The white man glories in being salaamed, especially by an oriental, who can grovel with a touch of art. And the Oriental has not been slow to capitalize his master's vanity."[19] The same charge can be levelled at Ralph Connor, Arthur Stringer, and other writers to be discussed. Their prejudice seriously inhibits any of these writers from commenting judiciously upon the mosaic of peoples who settled in Alberta.

Love between the sexes was no less a mystery to Stead than it was to Ralph Connor, although Stead, in one or two instances, capitalized on his own innocence, where Connor never did. Gander Stake's love traumas in Grain are still readable to a modern audience. But a more typical example of Stead's handling of this subject is in Dennison Grant. Dennison Grant, the protagonist, has just rescued Zen Transley, a beautiful ranchman's daughter, from a fire. Their horses have fled. Night has fallen. They are alone and in love. "The silence of the night had gathered about them, broken occasionally

by yapping of coyotes far down the valley. Segments of dull light fringed the horizon. The breeze was again blowing from the west, mild and balmy. Presently one of the segments of light grew and grew. It was as though it were rushing up the valley. They watched it, fascinated . . . as the orb of moon became recognizable."[20] And then comes one of the novel's crucial scenes, the scene in which Zen and Dennison do not make love. Stead might be forgiven his timidity to write frankly of love at this point. He was working strictly within the (then) very inflexible censorship laws of 1920. But Zen and Dennison do not even caress or kiss each other! They lie side by side in the moonlight while Grant explains his philosophy of life. It is to this philosophy that I would now like to turn, forgetting for the time being Stead's fumbling sense of timing and atmosphere.

Grant suggests that the world needs a new philosophy of production which could save it from starvation and inequalities of wealth. He is suspicious of two things: sloth and usury. He thinks that communism eliminates the possibility of individuals working for their own bread and thus brings on a slothful dereliction of responsibilities. But he thinks as well that capitalism is immoral when it allows rich men to grow richer from the sweat of others. He therefore suggests to Zen, who listens breathlessly, that he would like to set up a farming corporation with his own vast wealth. Profiteering would be curbed and individual responsibility would be

promoted. A man would gain only what he worked for, but he would not be permitted to prosper at the expense of less efficient co-farmers.

And here we have perhaps the first example of a Canadian novelist giving voice to the theories now referred to as social credit. As I was explaining in Chapter I, C. B. MacPherson isolates this credo as a belief in property and individual responsibility coupled with a suspicion of usury. The credit which Dennison Grant aspires to float at the end of the novel is 'social credit,' although Stead does not call it this. The novel was published more than ten years before that label became popular in Alberta.

So R. J. C. Stead stands in the same company with Connor and McClung. As an Alberta novelist he no doubt let his job interfere with the clarity of his artistic vision. For many years he worked as a publicity agent for land sales in Alberta, and his Alberta sequences often have the ring of such promotions. But he had no such designs upon the province of Manitoba, and by far his greatest book is Grain (1925), a Manitoba book. Still, he left us a philosophy, the first such to come out of an Alberta novel. Let us now turn to an author who, unlike Stead or McClung or Connor, had no moral axe to grind, a man who made the first attempts towards a realistic novel about Alberta. This man is Arthur Stringer.

His two biographies tell us that some time before the first great war, Arthur Stringer (1874-1950) had a love affair

with the separated wife of a prairie farmer. She was a sophisticated, beautiful woman,one of many such women in Stringer's life, and she had likely inhabited a farm near Stringer's own Alberta ranch.[21] This love affair was the seed of his once celebrated prairie trilogy. One is tempted to pursue the biographical parallels between Stringer's life in Alberta and his Alberta trilogy.

The story, written in three serialized novels (The Prairie Wife, 1915; The Prairie Mother, 1920; and The Prairie Child, 1922), describes the disintegration of a marriage on the Alberta prairie (west of Calgary near Cochrane, one of Connor's and Stead's favorite subregions).[22] The story is told by Chaddie McKail who is faithful to her husband throughout their marriage. And if we are to accept Chaddie's account as truthful (Stringer gives us no reason not to), Duncan's infidelities and lust for power, if not the sole reason for their break-up, place the marriage in jeopardy. Chaddie is saved from disintegration by Peter Ketley who (like Stringer in real life) understands her sophisticated cravings for culture, her possessive love for her children, and her indomitable spirit.

Since the prairie trilogy is the first approach to realism in Alberta fiction, I want to examine it more closely than any of the previous texts. None of the literature so far reviewed has warranted such an approach. The questions foremost in my mind are these: Is Chaddie a worthy enough heroine to justify the 1,058 pages of the trilogy (all of which are

narrated by her)? Has Stringer made too many concessions to the women's magazine genre in which he wrote most of his life? Does Stringer manage to engage the critical reader's sentiments without being sentimental? All of these questions revolve around Chaddie McKail as a fictive structure.

To see her as Stringer would want us to see her, we must begin at the end of the trilogy where all conflicts are eventually resolved. Peter Ketley, afraid that he cannot marry Chaddie after her divorce from Duncan, threatens to run away from her. Chaddie protests:

> 'But what will happen to me,if you do that?' I heard my own voice asking as Buntie started to paw the prairie floor and I did my level best to fight down the black waves of desolation that were half-drowning me. 'What'll there be to hold me up, when you're the only man in all this world who can keep my barrel of happiness from going slap-bang to pieces? . . . when you're the only man alive who understands this crazy old heart of mine, when you've taught me to hitch the last of my hope on the one unselfish man I've ever known?' (III, 380-381).

It is obvious that her feelings for Stringer-Ketley are intense, and that Stringer is not trying to be ironic. When Ketley tells her he loves her, here is her reaction. "A flute began to play in my heart. And I knew that like Ulysses's men I would have to close my ears to it. But it's easier to row past an island than to run away from your own heart" (III, 376). Our key to the 'real' Chaddie McKail is in Peter Ketley's final appraisal of her: "'That's what I love about you,' averred Peter. 'What you love about me?' I demanded. 'Yes,' he said with his patient old smile, 'your

imperishable youthfulness, your eternal never-ending eternity-defying golden-tinted girlishness!'" (III, 376).

How well does Chaddie live up to Peter's estimate of her? If we are to go solely on Chaddie's reports, she assures us time after time that she is the spirit of youth, optimism and fierce courage. Here is a sample:

> . . . there are mornings, when I am Browning's Saul in the flesh. The great wash of air from sky-line to sky-line puts something into my blood or brain that leaves me almost dizzy. I sizzle! It makes me pulse and tingle and cry out that life is good - good! . . . And at sunrise when the prairie is thinly silvered with dew, when the tiny hammocks of the spider-webs swing a million sparkling webs spun with diamonds, when every blade of grass is a singing string of pearls, hymning to God on High for the birth of a golden day, I can feel my heart swell, and I'm so abundantly, so inexpressibly alive, alive to every finger-tip! Such space, such light, such distances! And being Saul is so much better than reading about him! (I, 59-60).

The above is a rather gilded self-appraisal and the novel is full of such appraisal which hardly stops short of self-flattery. So the reader must make inferences to achieve an independent appraisal of Chaddie. For instance, she loves Duncan so jealously, so aggressively, that one wonders why he didn't leave her sooner. This love is transferred to her children, and she is dangerously protective toward her son especially. (He runs away) At one point she attempts to shoot her husband when he threatens to spank his son. Stringer seems aware of this vicious, forceful, lioness side to Chaddie. But how does he reconcile her character with Peter's high opinion of her? Could any man remain sane if his wife called

him (respectively) 'Kaikobad,' 'The Dour Maun,' 'Kitten-Cats,' and (the crowning touch) 'Dinky-Dunk'? And is Stringer aware that his protagonist is a more than occasional scatterbrain who imposes, with ego-laden cleverness, her trivialities on the quiet man whom we come to know as Dinky-Dunk?

For a woman to spout trivialities in fiction is no crime. We laugh at Waugh's Agatha Runcible, for instance. And in Cary's Sara Monday, there is a vast all-embracing humanity which overrides her trivialities (which, nevertheless, are sometimes high comedy). And Molly Bloom's ramblings are part of a tapestry, the frame of reference of which is classical. But Chaddie McKail's personal allusive structure is rooted in the trivial, not the classical. "Then I mopped my eyes, took one long quavery breath, and said out loud, as Birdalone Pebbley said Shiner did when he was lying wounded on the field of Magersfontein: Squealer, squealer, who's a squealer? "(I, 21). What is more, Chaddie's humanity is as pretentious as her cultural background. She is like the characters of Stead and Connor in this regard. Stringer, especially in the second novel of the trilogy, takes no pains to disguise his contempt for 'Japs,' 'Chinks,' and 'Redskins.' Chaddie is usually the vehicle for such racist tirades.

Yet Stringer allows Chaddie, in the conclusion quoted from above, to come out as "golden-tinted" as Ketley describes her to be. In other words, by placing conflicting demands on the

reader with regard to Chaddie's real nature, Stringer has not justified his own conclusion. The trilogy is disconcertingly divided against itself. When Arthur Stringer was younger and desperate for recognition and money, he wrote movie scripts for The Perils of Pauline and later became a highly popular writer of women's magazine fiction. Could it be, then, that in his first and (almost) only sustained attempt at realism, he was not entirely able to shake off the habit of mind which he had acquired in his twenties and early thirties?

Ralph Connor put Alberta on the fictional map. R. J. C. Stead handed down a philosophy. Nellie McClung isolated several key themes for future Alberta writers. But only Arthur Stringer attempted to portray a love relationship with any depth or frankness. I refer not only to the sometimes flawed portrayal of Chaddie and Duncan's marriage, but as well to the love relationship which develops between Chaddie and her children. The value in the prairie trilogy rests in Stringer's occasional insights into the changing moods characteristic of familial and romantic love and the effects of region on these moods. It can be argued that Stringer, in spite of the many artistic difficulties he encounters or creates, is capable of some clear-sighted responses to his region.

His account, for instance, of Duncan McKail's decline from a lean and courageous farmer to a paunchy, scheming

financial opportunist is at times well co-ordinated with the available resources of the Alberta setting. Following are some examples of Stringer's awareness of region. Chaddie complains that her "heart is perishing of cold in a province which is estimated to contain almost seventeen per cent. of the world's known coal supply" (II, 197). This complaint underlines the theme, already considered in connection with Painted Fires, of financial wealth in tension with spiritual desolation. Here is another of Chaddie's regional observations, this time of Calgary, whose bustling commerce seduces Duncan from the farm. "It impresses me as a frontier cow-town grown out of its knickers and still ungainly in its first long trousers. But I can't help being struck by the people's incorruptible pride in their own community. It's a sort of religious faith, a fixed belief in the future, a stubborn optimism that is surely something more than self-interest. It's the Dutch courage that makes deprivation and long waiting endurable" (III, 305). It is precisely this stubborn optimism which induces the historian Jean Burnet to dub this same region 'next year country.' It is the awesome beauty of the prairie foothills region which inspires in Chaddie her greatest ambition in life: to be happy and to find "the pot of gold that they told her was to be found at the rainbow's end" (III, 9). Her rationale is quite sentimental but very much a response to the land.[23]

Chaddie wants the pot of gold and Duncan wants money and power. At the conclusion of the trilogy they get what they want, for the region yields it to them. I discussed briefly in chapter I the tendency in Saskatchewan fiction to stress the theme of survival, and bare minimum survival, often with tragic results. In Wallace Stegner's story from Wolf Willow, "Carrion Spring," the protagonist and his wife decide to carry on ('Carrion' in the title puns on this) in spite of the annihilation of their herd of cattle. In Arthur Storey's Prairie Harvest Henry and Marie are forced to leave their land in the end because it cannot support a crop. In Edward McCourt's Home is the Stranger Norah is driven insane by the desolation of the land, particularly by its inability to form the romantic back-drop so necessary to her dreams. In W. O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind, the dry Saskatchewan prairie is responsible for the paralysis of Mitchell's community which Uncle Sean seeks in vain to mobilize. Ralph Allen, Sinclair Ross, Max Braithwaite and Vera Lysenko provide similar examples, some of which will be discussed later.

Perhaps the best contrast to the great expectations of Chaddie and Duncan in Saskatchewan fiction is to be found in Sinclair Ross's Canadian classic As for Me and My House (1941). Many of its incidents are so close to those of Stringer's trilogy, that it would appear that Ross used it as a working model for his masterpiece. In both novels the narrative is

advanced by the journal entries of the female protagonists, Chaddie McKail and Mrs. Bentley. In both novels the women become emotionally dependent upon their usually indifferent husbands and seek the love of one or more of their children. Both women are too sensitive and cultured for the tastes of their provincial, somewhat coarse neighbors. Both women are classical pianists. Both women develop friendships with the local school teacher who, in both cases (Gershom Binks and Paul Kirby), are pedantic philologists. In both cases these men create feelings of jealousy in the husbands of each novel. The parallels can be extended much beyond these simple observations.

But the differences are intriguing. Mrs. Bentley does not seek anything close to Chaddie's pot of gold; nor does Philip Bentley seek power and wealth as Duncan does. Neither of the Bentleys can aspire to these extravagances because Ross's setting (just like the Saskatchewan of depression histories) does not yield to or encourage such aspirations. Mrs. Bentley describes this relationship between the depressed region and its imprisoned people.

> They were a sober, work-roughened congregation. There was strength in their voices when they sang, like the strength and darkness of the soil. The last hymn was staidly orthodox, but through it there seemed to mount something primitive, something that was less a response to Philip's sermon and scripture reading than to the grim futility of their own lives. Five years in succession now they've been blown out, dried out, hailed out; and it was as if in the face of so blind and uncaring a universe they were trying to assert themselves, to insist upon their own meaning and importance (19).

Ross's people have voices "like the strength and darkness of the soil." But their relationship with the land is a tragic one in this novel. In Stringer's only other Alberta novel, The Mudlark (1931), Joan Alicia Eustis has an equally close relationship with the land. But hers, as the plot unfolds, becomes a very fulfilling one. Here is the novel's conclusion: ". . . I realize that I, too, am like the soil. I feel the old and timeless bond that exists between Mother Earth, so patient and passive and willing to give, and the rapture-torn heart of womanhood itself."[25]

Unlike Arthur Stringer, Sinclair Ross has the power not only to invoke the metaphors which liken his personages to the land they inhabit, but to disperse these metaphors in such a way that they exist organically in the consciousness of his characters. The following passage exhibits the sort of emotional poverty and dryness brought on by the land and the depression.

> Then white-lipped he excused himself and went into his study. I waited a few minutes before following him. He was standing at the window, the curtains pushed back, his face against the glass. When I touched his arm he swung round almost angrily,then took my hand and turned again to look through the window at the ugly little roofs of Horizon.
>
> I glanced up and saw a twitch to his lips. There were lines around his mouth that made him seem spent, almost broken. His hand stayed quick and strong on mine as if he wanted me there-- as if he were trying to tell me so.
>
> It was more of him than I had had in weeks, but afraid to be spendthrift with such a moment I slipped away from him again (22-23).

Compared to Sinclair Ross's awareness of his region, Stringer's is incomplete. I began this chapter saying that the regional

writer was one to the country born, his imagination a sensitively organic product of the land. Ross was born to his region, but Stringer first came to Alberta as a tourist from the sophisticated literary societies of Ontario, New York and Oxford. It shows in all his Alberta fiction, but particularly in The Mudlark.

Joan Eustis is a mail-order bride who marries a taciturn, hard working local farmer. She is a society girl from London and competes with her husband's grain crop for his favours. "Big Jim" even prefers sleeping with his sacks of seed grain to sleeping with his beautiful bride. But Stringer will not allow Big Jim to be just the Alberta farmer. He must embellish the man with a whole assortment of sophisticated trappings. Here, for instance, is the farmer's library: Huxley's Lectures and Lay Sermons, Carlyle's Sartor Resartus, Lyell's Antiquity of Man, Spenser's First Principles, Shakespeare's complete works, Boswell's Life of Johnson, Palgrave's Golden Treasury and Macauley's Essays.

And what do the farm couple talk of? "We talked, on the way over, of everything under the sun from the passing of the Indian to the appeal of Shelley's poetry, from the history of the wheat-berry to the educational system of England, which Jamie holds to be all wrong, with its sanctification of what we erroneously call the Public School and its anachronistic accent on social caste " (147).

Perhaps the main reason that Stringer failed to bring his region to life in realistic terms is that his frame of reference, as seen in his narratives (which are invariably filtered through the minds of sophisticated, globe-trotting women), was that of the educated tourist. Stringer is far more interested in the plight of the socially elite in an isolated prairies setting than he is in the portrayal of native prairie dwellers. They comprise his cast of comic, or grotesque or despised minor characters. Like Ms. McClung, he was able through his knowledge of his region to isolate such themes as the false lure of wealth. This was particularly well done in the prairie trilogy. And from The Mudlark we should note an interesting metaphor to which we will return in future Alberta novels: the land as a fertile, demanding mistress.

Stringer's work is characterized by a certain marginality which detracts seriously from his treatment of region. That is, he attempted to render the rural scene in terms external to the region. Chaddie and Joan are incapable of reporting the prairie realities and so, we must assume, is Stringer. This tendency is also apparent in the two Alberta novels of Isabel Paterson, a writer who was not blessed by as large a following as Stringer. Her major personages are usually bored with or disdainful of their surroundings. Dust, for instance, "is the characteristic smell of Alberta."[26] Their best attributes (according to Ms. Paterson)

are often useless in Alberta. An example is Pennington York from The Magpie's Nest (1917). Like most of Paterson's men, he is an easterner who wishes to return to the east as soon as he has made his fortune on the frontier. And like some of Stringer's, McClung's and Dickson's male protagonists he views Alberta as a temporary base camp where money is to be made quickly but to be enjoyed in more sophisticated and hospitable areas.

> All his personal assets here were valueless: connections, charms, social polish he found quite useless in a place where the social order was just emerging from a pastoral democracy. Energy was wanted, for these people were laying foundations, not adding the last touches and decorations; he was as little needed as a mural painter would be when only the framework of a house is built, and his rewards were commensurate. True, he had friends; and from them he got friendship of a sort-- just what he gave, in fact, which was just what he did not need.27

Disdain gives way to grudging admiration, however, in some cases. The following passage is such an example, in which Paterson's physical description (from Shadow Riders) leads the reader into the utilitarian spirit of the early province.

> 'Do you really like it?' he asked, watching Chan closely. They had got a few hours to themselves, and had chosen to go motoring, circling the town as they returned. Indian Summer enwrapped them, though snow had fallen a week before, a little flirtatious storm. The endless prairie wind had forgotten to blow for an hour of mid-afternoon.
>
> 'Yes, I think I do,' said Chan. 'It's ugly enough--' He looked at the city sprawling in all its dusty nakedness before them; the square boxes of houses, flimsy, hasty, unapologetic; the treeless streets; the crassly utilitarian business section, still showing shops with false wooden fronts masquerading as two stories when they were but one, unabashed beside one or two square grey stone office buildings; the plucked looking square that courtesy dubbed a park-- and the new residential section, nearest them, all

> jigsaw horrors and imitation bungalows climbing the hill they were about to descend. 'Oh, it's a camp,' said Chan again thoughtfully. 'All this will go some day, every stick of it.' He included the bungalows and layer-cake dwellings of the newly rich and great. 'I suppose the first generation never really builds, does it? It only takes possession and runs up its flag. But the mere growth is rather stimulating. It's alive' (114).

Ms. Paterson's instincts led her from Alberta to the major English speaking capitals of the world where she wrote five more novels, none of them about her Alberta origins. In both her Alberta novels one can sense her impatience to write of things which in no way had a correlative in early Alberta. There are many scenes in her Alberta novels like the following one from Riders in which her ambition to write of high society is somewhat discordant with her setting. This setting is Banff, 1914.

> They dined very informally, and to save Lesley from feeling shabby Eileen wore a simple afternoon gown, but after dinner the two women withdrew in English fashion. Eileen had caught Lesley's unspoken request for a word alone. They strolled out on the verandah, where they could still hear faint snatches of deep-toned talk from within. Lesley fell gratefully into a hammock; Eileen disposed herself in a grass chair under a Chinese lantern, with her unfailing instinct for effect (312).

In very few scenes in Riders is Ms. Paterson able to utilize any of her region. Perhaps, in her desire to create the effect of a settled elite society, her region was a source of embarassment to her. Her many disdainful comments would appear to support this opinion. And like her more sympathetic contemporary Nellie McClung, to impose a domestic order on a region too uncivilized for her comprehension, she has the

aggravating habit of resorting to housewife metaphors in her rural descriptions. "The storm raged itself out; before the snow had time to compose to the outline of the earth a chinook shrieked down from over the heads of the mountains, and the white coverlet shrank and dissolved as if a hot iron were being passed over it" (The Magpie's Nest, p. 131).

Lacking any vital intimacy with her region, Ms. Paterson turned, in both early novels, to British novels of manners for her formulae of composition. Both Alberta novels, for instance, bear a strong resemblance to Thackeray's Vanity Fair. And in both cases, Paterson's heroines discover to their displeasure that Alberta and Thackeray's England are simply not compatible. Here, for example, is a passage from The Magpie's Nest.

> She wished she could feel serious about Eleanor Travers's projected call. Lately she had been reading Vanity Fair. Would Becky Sharp have spent so much diplomacy and duplicity to attain, say, to Mrs. Lockwood's teas? Mrs. Lockwood, plump and placid, whose husband had made the most money, and who therefore, led society?
>
> Of course there was no real difference in being a Knight of the Garter and the Golden Fleece, and a master-butcher, so long as one was 'first in the village in Gaul,' but, since her part was to be all concerned with outward show and made no pretence of examining inward worth, Hope felt she ought at least to have the show. The game might not be worth the candle, but by every right there should be a candle, if there was to be a game. So far there was a difference between a Duchess and a butcher's wife, and Hope could understand Becky Sharp.
>
> Becky's candle glittered very brightly, anyway.
>
> But perhaps Eleanor Travers and the remoter Mrs. Lockwood might have something to offer of themselves. One ought to try it out. There wasn't anything else, as Mary Dark had said (55).

But there was something else; Ms. Paterson simply didn't acquaint herself with the earthy spirits which inhabited her region, spirits which make their first appearance in Alberta fiction in the thirties, and to which I will return in connection with F. J. Niven and Georges Bugnet.

The Alberta fiction of Connor, Stead, McClung, Stringer and Paterson ranges from 1899 to 1931. One is tempted, in summing up their achievement, to speculate what they could have accomplished given the cultural amenities of their eastern contemporaries, F. P. Grove or Martha Ostenso, for instance. If Ralph Connor had read Freud instead of popular melodramas, he might not have discoursed, with such abandon, about gay crusaders lancing boldly into the lips of Gwen's canyon which, unhappily, is lined with wild maiden hair. And if R. J. C. Stead had admired Henry Fielding as much as he admired adventure novels, his male protagonists would not have appeared as pedantic eunuchs to a modern audience. One should not wonder at the present popularity or the historical relevance of James Gray's Red Lights on the Prairies (1971) after what has preceded his enlightened example. If Ms. McClung had been as liberal in her selection of personal reading as she was in her politics, she might have raised her Helmi out of the pathos of conventional melodrama. If Isabel Paterson had had access to Faulkner's early novels and learned, as Faulkner did, to study and report her region at the level of the common man rather than at the cocktail party level, she might have

written with less impatience about the inhabitants and traditions of her region. And if Arthur Stringer, who enjoyed all the advantages which the other four did not, had been less ambitious to live in the manner to which great lovers and not great writers are accustomed, he might have written a lasting novel.

Very few novels about Alberta appeared between the beginning of the depression and the end of the war. Not only had the most prolific writers (Connor, Stead, McClung and Stringer) stopped writing fiction, but the economics of book production were such, during these years, that buying and therefore writing novels was rarely encouraged.[28] I have located only four works of fiction, other than two translated fictions, two in the original French, and Stringer's Mudlark. For the purposes of this chapter I have selected F. J. Niven's The Flying Years (1935), Wilfred Eggleston's The High Plains (1938) and Lovat Dickson's Out of the West Land (1944). The non-English fiction and Tay John will be discussed later.

F. J. Niven (1878-1944) wrote over thirty books, one of which was set primarily in Alberta. The Flying Years is an historical novel which spans about sixty-five years of Canadian history. Niven chooses a Scottish immigrant, Angus Munro, to wander through the annals of western settlement. Niven utilizes a number of historical journals to authenticate his novel, and in fact quotes from many of them and litters every

chapter with rumours about Palliser, Riel, Alexander Ross, David Thompson and dozens of other famed historical figures. In fact, after the first third of the book, which spans a reasonable length of time (about four years), one is aware that Angus Munro is taking us on a whirlwind tour of prairie history. What begins as a closely authenticated historical novel, becomes a documentary in which the background displaces, at times, the importance of the protagonist. The last two thirds of the novel takes us through sixty years. Following are some examples of Niven's approach.

Early in the novel, when Niven is chronicling Angus Munro's arrival in Canada (first Red River, then Alberta), he is satisfied to use images of place to evoke his surroundings. Here, for example, is Angus' first view of the Rockies.

> Something happened to him beyond the power to express; something happened, wordless, like music. As though the blue of the sky had run and thickened roughly at the base, there lay the ranges, low in contrast with the height of that space of blue but. . . majestic in their serene extent. They dropped away to south, they dropped away to north, as into a quiet eternity. Here and there slashes of white showed among their purple. Here and there rocky gables twinkled like mirrors, and at one place, far in, there was a dun seething, peaks turning to cloud and clouds solidifying into peaks. A lightning flash was drawn in quick gold on that portion where peaks and clouds fused, and then came a distant sound, the faintest rumble.29

One of the truly fine features of this novel is its remarkable sense of place. Scotland is rendered beautifully "through a web of yammering gulls;" Red River is rendered as a transplanted Scotland submerged in the sounds and racial artifacts

of Manitoba history.

Niven's novel has two major themes: the swift passage of time and the exile's search for a homeland. When Niven develops his former theme by allowing references to time's passage to arise naturally from the subject matter, he is successful. Here is that theme rendered in terms of the Cree calendar.

> The new year came and the new year slipped along. The moon of the sore eyes was none too bad because of a warm wind (the Chinook) which wiped the snow away. The moon when the geese lay eggs came, geese and ducks honking over, driving their wedges into the north; and Minota sang:
>
> > The ice has broken in the rivers,
> > The geese and the ducks fly over,
> > All day - and even at night (47).

But Niven's hand falters when he steps out of the action of the novel to hammer home his temporal theme. After an insufferable number of reminders ('Indeed time was flying' or 'Yes, the years were flying,' etc., etc.) Niven closes the book with this passage. "Well, like Sam's, his life had been a full one, thought he, reviewing these the flying years. In his mind there was a sanctuary, with these for company. Soon he must be going. He looked up at the clock. How quickly time passed! He rose, a little stiffly, and went tapping over the tiles to catch his train home"(253).

This passage goes down very hard indeed after the book's very stirring penultimate passage. In it, Angus is sitting in the fashionable lounge of Calgary's Palliser Hotel

in 1920. But his memories impose themselves on his consciousness. Nowhere in Alberta literature has the theme of time's passage been more poignantly rendered-- and rendered through implication only.

> Other music came, and he was riding up the north bank of the Bow with Gus Atkins (ruddy of hair, ruddy of face) after having unpacked the horses beside the Redcoats' camp. Then the lounge of the Palliser was full of voices for him, the voices of Sarcee Indians and of Stoneys (Minota's mother was a Stoney) riding through. They were all painted and feathered. Bells were on the horses' bridles. They came jogging from the ballroom to west toward the dining-room to east. People going in to early dinner did not see them, only he. The early diners surrendered their coats and hats to the tall girl at the cloak alcove, and the headwaiters received them with a bow and a salute of menu card; but the Sarcees and the Stoneys rode on, trailing travois, lodge-poles, raising the dust on their way to that great gathering at Blackfoot Crossing in '77. The elevators hummed up and down, with a smooth click opened to deposit those guests who descended and to receive those who waited-- click and hum. The horses whinnied as they passed, or cleared their throats of a husk, and there was laughter in the cavalcade, the sweet laughter of Indian women (252-253).

Why then could Niven not have stuck to his original theme, the exile's search for a homeland? Why has Niven allowed his fixation on time's swift passage to envelope his otherwise moving story? The reason lies, I think, in the temporal breadth of his subject matter. To tell the story of the Indian's loss of his homeland, Niven felt he had to portray not only this loss, but the era before the loss, the Indian's twilight age. Or seeing it from Angus' point of view, to tell the story of Angus' discovery of his new-found homeland, Niven felt he had to portray his loss of the old one. Both

of these stories, the Indians' and Angus', which play off and enrich each other, necessitated the portrayals of three generations of Indians and settlers, and of three separate settings. Contemporaries of Niven, Proust or Woolf for instance, would argue against Niven's method. They would say he was enslaved by time, and they would advocate bringing forth Munro's memories into the flow of his consciousness. This way the past could be demonstrably participating in the present, and Niven would have liked this. But he resists any narrative form that would interrupt the chronology of his historical continuum. The result of all this is a novel which serves the laws of history rather than its own novelistic conventions. Here is an example of how history intrudes into the natural flow of the novel. The speaker is Sam Lovat Douglas, the Scottish entrepreneur, and he is simply describing the mechanics of one of his oxen trains.

> We hitch these carts three together, said Sam, and in the three is just a fair load for twenty oxen. It's a great idea, a great scheme, simple, like many a great scheme. In the rains there's whiles muddy places between here and Fort Benton, and when the wagons get mired-- they're up to the hubs at times-- the drivers just uncouple the two rear ones, haul the lead to good ground and then go back with the oxen and bring the others, one at a time, link them up again, and away they go. The Benton Trail is safe for travel now. When the Redcoats came in there the whiskey peddlers just walked out, the way Riel walked out at Fort Garry, I heard, when Wolsley arrived - not that there is any comparison between Riel, with his halfbreeds anxious over their future, watching all the government surveyors poking round there since the company relinquished to the Dominion, and these whiskey-traders. Yes, I've got nine wagons for that work-- sixty bulls, as they call the oxen here-- and I've got sixty pack horses . . . (III).

In the above passage, Niven the historian is interrupting Douglas the entrepreneur. And the resultant loss of narrative illusion is infuriating to the reader of novels. Wallace Stegner in his combined fictional-historical narrative Wolf Willow prevents the clash of history and fictional narrations by confining his fictional stories to one section of Wolf Willow. Having read Stegner's very skillful presentation of his subject matter, having observed the vivid, fleshed-out historical data, and having thrilled to his wild west (fictional) sagas, one is led to a disturbing question. Why read Niven? The Flying Years is historically accurate, but less imformative than the journals, say, of McKenzie or Thompson. The Flying Years has some memorable fictional passages, but refuses to aspire to the definition of a novel.

An historical novelist must embody history or leave it alone. When Niven does this, he is inspiring to read. His empathy for and understanding of his Indian subjects, after men like Connor and Stringer, is truly heartening. This short passage typifies his attitude. "Only the mentally deficient among the conquerors [whites] would giggle at them [Indian names] more than over many names of their own people-- Buffalo no more odd than Lamb, Sagebrush no funnier than Greenwood, Duck no more to be derided than Swan!" (179). With such a strong empathy for his subject matter (the empathy of an exiled highlander) Niven does embody history intermittently. For instance, there is a reservation scene in which he manages

to withdraw from any commentary on the specific historical context from which the scene arises. The context is the Riel rebellion which, historians tell us, scarcely reached the present Alberta territory. The Blackfoot legions and scattered tribes of Cree were convinced not to join. In the scene, Angus, at the reservation where he is the agent, frets that his Indian son, All Alone, will take his band to join Riel. Fiona, his second wife, has just given birth and they hear shots outside. "There was All Alone confronting him. He was evidently the leader of this party. In answer to Angus' imploring gestures the firing stopped, the circling of the painted horses was ended. They jogged this way and that. The young chief dropped from the saddle and, advancing to the agent, held out his hand. Angus stared, then held out his. 'We have just heard your woman has child. We have come to say it makes our hearts glad, said All Alone'" (176-177). The Indians leave with "the squelching sounds of horses' hoofs, and the little tinkling of the small, round Hudson's Bay Company bells that some had tied to the manes-- a tinkling, a squelching, and occasional subdued voices in the musical Cree as the painted braves, headed by All Alone, rode away with little explosions of receding laughter" (177).

The regional writer's imagination, as I stated at the beginning of this chapter, is a sensitively organic product of the land which it reports. To embody regional history the

writer must obviously know it, but should express its annals only by implication. In the above passage, if we wish to make historical inferences about the confinement of the Riel rebellion, the substance for these inferences is there. But it is sensuously presented, not stated. Painted horses joggle, horses' hoofs squelch, laughter explodes as it recedes, and history is embodied. In occasional passages Niven demonstrates an uncanny sense of place, a lyric gift for rendering scenes sensuously, and a refreshing empathy for his subject matter. And he has left us with Angus Munro and All Alone, two well rounded characters who speak vividly-- far more so than Niven's explicit history-- of Alberta's early years.

Shortly after Wilfrid Eggleston (born 1901) published The High Plains (1938), F. P. Grove wrote his only piece of Alberta fiction, "The Desert."[30] Both pieces are set primarily in the arid southeastern plain near Medicine Hat. In Grove's story the dry plain becomes a region of the mind. That is, the desert in which Alice, Grove's protagonist, chooses to live becomes associated with her isolation from the common run of humanity. Eggleston's novel, however, is an example of sociological rather than psychological fiction.

A sociological novel (about farm life) is one which scans the nature of community life, the physical details of farming, the effects of environment on the community, and the effects of the community on the environment. The domestic

stories which arise from a typical sociological farm novel should reflect typical local histories from that region. Stead's Grain and Grove's Fruits of the Earth are good examples. Surprisingly enough none of Alberta's early novelists were able to write one novel which could be said to have captured the sociology of a community. This is surprising because McClung, Connor and Stead had each written at least one sociological novel about their native provinces. Sowing Seeds in Danny, the Glengarry series and Grain all achieve the cross-sectional effect of a farm community novel, a necessary effect when writing as the artist-sociologist. Stringer's trilogy is cross-sectional and he goes to great pains to describe farm life in technical depth. But in the trilogy, all sociological details are subordinated to the various love triangles which form and disintegrate throughout the trilogy.

The weaknesses of this type of fiction come out very clearly in The High Plains, Alberta's first sociological novel. The cross-section of local history to which Eggleston devotes his attention is the Alberta Palliser's Triangle settlers in the years before and after World War I. He dedicates his novel to these settlers, among whom were his parents. The action of the novel goes from Stavely (one hundred miles south of Calgary) to Seven Persons (the centre of Alberta's arid land south of Medicine Hat) and back west to an irrigated farm near Lethbridge. The three settings correspond to three phases of

Alberta farming: tenant farming (near Stavely), homesteading (near Seven Persons) and irrigation purchase plots (near Lethbridge).

Each setting is scrupulously observed in terms of the physical characteristics of the terrain and in terms of the farming techniques used to conquer the terrain. In Part I (the Stavely section), Chapter I, the snow-trek episode is very effective not merely as a piece of natural description but as an indication of the impact of prairie terrain on an English mind. In Parts II and III (the Seven Persons section) Eggleston's eye is still sharply focussed on terrain, but as well on farm techniques and the cross-section of local settlers, and in particular on David Barnes' family of British settlers. Their efforts to turn "the Promised Land" into a garden are defeated by Eggleston's "uncaring gods of weather," and they move to the irrigation land where they buy a small farm in Part IV of the novel (the Lethbridge section).

It is the initiative of Eric Barnes, David's youngest son, which brings the family to the only successful phase of their farming careers. And to David, this move to the irrigated district is the fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy: "The wilderness and the solitary place shall be glad for them; and the desert shall rejoice, and blossom as the rose. . . Then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing; for in the wilderness shall waters break out, and streams in the desert" (267). The victory over the soil, as

far as Eric is concerned, is not the fulfillment of biblical prophecy, but a technological victory. Because Eric is the protagonist of the novel and because Eggleston devotes so much space to farm technology,it is safe to assume whose side Eggleston supports. It is Eric's technical knowledge of machinery which allows him to solve a murder mystery, and it is a scientist whom he saves from the authorities when the true murderer is arrested. The scientist, Sylvester Huck, is Eric's only teacher and mentor during his formative years. Sometimes both Grain and The High Plains read like eulogies to scientific farming, and it is possible that Eggleston learned a great deal from Stead, on whom he has published some biographical facts.

There are two underplots running parallel to the harvest-drought theme in this novel. One is the love of Eric Barnes for his childhood sweetheart, Faye Masterson; the other is Eric's involvement with Sylvester Huck, including his rescuing the old scientist from jail. The second underplot has little to do with the main theme of the story. Perhaps, like Stead in The Homesteaders and The Bail Jumper, Eggleston could not find enough to write about in his region without resorting to intrigues and adventures. Stead, as I have mentioned, associated Alberta with romance and adventure. Following is Eggleston's inscription to his novel.

Down sinks the sun;
Down sighs the wind;
Down cools the lonely plain;
Up surges all the calm of night:
The scent of stocks, the fading light,
The night jar and the rustling grain. . .

And now the dreamer's eyes may see,
Beyond the shadow-haunted plain
The hills still golden in the sun
Where glamour lurks, and poetry
Will live when day's dull prose is done.

The 'glamour' and 'poetry' of this novel is, of course, to be found in the romance-adventure underplots; the 'day's dull prose' is the agricultural quest of the settlers. The love story between Faye and Eric ends unfulfilled when Faye leaves on a mission for the Mormon church. Eric loses her because "the lusts of late adolescence. . . beginning to clamour for expression" (241) went unquenched. By scrupulously avoiding any discussion of these 'lusts of late adolescence,' or by merely talking about them clinically, Eggleston has confined his novel seriously. And this brings us to the weaknesses of Eggleston as a novelist in particular and the sociological farm novel in general.

I have mentioned R. J. C. Stead's Grain in connection with The High Plains because both are cross-sectional studies of a farm community. But what makes Grain a minor classic in Canadian fiction is not Stead's theories on, say, the farm wife in rural communities or the mechanization of harvest techniques. It is the character development of Gander Stake which ensures the book's survival in Canadian rural fiction.

But what Eggleston has to offer is primarily his technical data, his sometimes stirring scenic descriptions, and his study of the effects of cultural deprivation on Eric (Chapter II). He has not left us with a Gander Stake or even a Chaddie McKail through whom he might have humanized his desolate landscape.

As I implied earlier in this chapter, the only novel of Lovat Dickson, Out of the West Land, seems to represent a summation of most of the failures which have been discussed in connection with the other early Alberta novelists. Most of this long novel's action takes place in and around Edmonton between 1936 and 1938. There are brief flashbacks to the earlier days of Alberta and to other parts of Canada. The story's conclusion is set in the war torn London and Hampshire of 1941. The following passage typifies Dickson's approach to his settings. "The University of Alberta occupies a commanding position on the edge of the escarpments that rise steeply from the valley through which the North Saskatchewan River runs. The river, at this point, is a chalk-coloured stream, a good 75 yards wide, flowing with vigour to meet the Arctic Ocean, 800 miles to the north. . . . the University with its unattractive buildings.. . sprawled in a sort of remoteness from the rest of the city, but was always visible to the eye of Edmonton's inhabitants, most of whom sent their sons, and many sent their daughters there."[31]

A regional scholar would first ask why Dickson has diverted this 'chalk-coloured stream a good 75 yards wide' into the Arctic Ocean, for he has described the Athabasca River far better than the Saskatchewan. Secondly, he would ask why Dickson, in the midst of the great depression, would violate historical logic and statistics by having most of Edmonton's inhabitants send their children to the University of Alberta.

At this point a critic might step in saying that the poet or novelist has license to impose his own imaginative geography on the region which originally inspired him. Dickson was a student at Alberta under E. K. Broadus during the thirties so he should know his facts. But the regional scholar would counter that Dickson promptly forgets about his mythical river for the rest of the novel. At this point, the regional scholar is forced to conclude, as I am, that Dickson's memory was merely bad. And speaking as a critic, I would wonder why Dickson did not spare us so many unutilized details. Is he not imposing too much memory work on his imagined landscape? And could not this book of 446 pages have been curtailed to half this length? Let us turn to the other myth Dickson has created in his quoted passage, the unusual affluence of Edmontonians during the depression. He does this for two purposes: to justify the use of his (usually) affluent characters, and to justify his blissful ending. If the author

can divert his reader from the frustrations and squalor which, in real life, characterized his region, then his female protagonist, Elaine MacTaviot, would not appear to be a spoiled coquette; his main male protagonist (Richard Danby) would not appear to be an opportunist; and his other male protagonist (Ralph Harriman) would not appear to be an upper-class, colonial bore. Quoted below is the scene which concludes the novel. Elaine has married Ralph and they have adopted a son. Ralph sees the two of them looking fondly at him. "He looked up and saw them smiling down at him from the stairs, and his own smile flew up to them, and happiness and content with each other flowed like a current between these three hearts" (446).

The people in whom Dickson is most interested are the well-to-do established English and Scottish families of Edmonton and England. All of his lower class characters are caricatured (as in the case of Danny, Nick, 'Rat,' and numerous other French, Indian, Métis and Ukranian walk-ons) or villainized (as in the case of Tommy Kolchak and Ann, his Métis wife). Richard Danby's disdain for these people comes out unguardedly at times: "What a worthless sort of fellow I am. . . within a week I'm lusting after a half-breed woman" (314). By contrast, here are the people who interest Dickson the most.

> There are some homes where happiness and content seem present in fuller measure than they do in others. There are some families which appear to have won the favorable attention of Fate, just as there are others which seem always out of favour with it. Since 1913 Andrew and Elspeth had lived happily at Acadia, and even in lean years or in periods of depression things had not gone badly with them. The farm had become richer, they had not known what it was to have illness in the house, their servants and workers had been happy and content; and Elaine, born to them four years after they had settled in the West, had grown up like a little flower, loved by everybody on the farm almost as much as they loved her themselves. Andrew knew that he was a lucky man, and Elspeth knew that God had been kind to her to give her such a home, a man she loved so well as Andrew, and a child as lovely and as intelligent as Elaine. Perhaps it was because everyone at Acadia was so consciously aware of their good fortune, that it continued without a break, for there is nothing that good fortune likes better than acknowledgement and where happiness and content are already in the air, more happiness and content seem to follow. At Acadia there were cheerful faces and loving hearts, and always generosity of conduct, to be observed in everybody from Andrew down to the youngest of the field hands,and in that atmosphere of deep and pleasant understanding Elaine grew up (60-61).

Out of the West Land is a novel which demonstrates how an elite crew of nice, happy, cheerful, rich people test their fate against the nastiness of the world, and remain nice, happy, cheerful and rich. The exception, of course, is Richard Danby who dies a hero's death in the Battle of Britain. Dickson has not come to terms with his geographical (or his human) region. He has peopled his ill-drawn (or ill-remembered) landscape with too small a segment of humanity to engage the human issues to which the novel is committed.

Like Stringer, McClung and Paterson, Dickson romanticized the lure of the province's north and the beauty of the Rockies. Like Stead, Paterson and Stringer, he portrayed his

native Alberta characters as inferior specimens, especially if they represented a lower or less educated class than that of his elite circle of major characters. Like Connor, Stead, Stringer and (to a lesser extent) McClung, he was racist in his appraisal of men. Like most of his Alberta contemporaries, even Niven, his sentiments appeared to get the best of him. Their problem was one discussed by Hugh MacLennan in his novel The Watch that Ends the Night.[32]

> Happiness is one of the hardest things to write about, and the difficulty of doing so makes me long to be a musician or a painter, for painters and musicians are at ease with the supreme emotion, which is not grief but joy abounding. To be able to make a joyful noise to the Lord or a praise of colors and forms would seem to me to equate any man with gods or little children. Happiness annihilates time. We measure history by its catastrophes, we recall the weather by its storms, but the periods of peace and joy-- who can describe them? (299-300).

Superficial optimism, coupled with a somewhat (British) colonial attitude toward the region and its inhabitants, characterized almost all of the early fiction of the province. Niven was not a spectacular exception to this generalization, but the fact that he identified politically with the victims of British colonialism (or any type of colonialism) must have enhanced his inclination to express realistically the native elements of his region. All of these writers not only placed Alberta on the map of the English speaking world's imagination, but they unfortunately left the evidence of their alien origins upon this map. The next chapter is a discussion of the French novelist, Georges Bugnet, who succeeded where nearly all of the Alberta writers (including Niven) who were his contemporaries, failed.

CHAPTER II

THE BEGINNINGS

NOTES

1 George Core, ed., Regionalism and Beyond (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 1968), p. 161.

2 The three scholars in question, who compiled over a hundred pages of critical and scholarly data on these writers, are Professors Gordon Roper, Ross Beharriel and Rupert Schieder. Most of their work is done as a group effort and is therefore not attributed to any one scholar. But their opinions do not diverge much from those offered by Professors Pacey and McCourt in their books on these early authors (Creative Writing in Canada and The Canadian West in Fiction respectively).

3 See LHC, pp. 297, 299, 683 for examples.

4 The Man from Glengarry (1901; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1969), p. 20. Hereafter cited as Man.

5 I am referring to the four major critics of Connor's work Edward A. McCourt, The Canadian West in Fiction (Toronto: Ryerson, 1949); pp. 30-32; Desmond Pacey, Creative Writing in Canada (Toronto: Ryerson, 1961), pp. 76, 91, 103-105; F. W. Watt, "Western Myth, the World of Ralph Connor," Canadian Literature, I (1959), pp. 26-36; and S. Ross Beharriel, Introduction to Man, pp. vii-xii.

6 Sky Pilot (Toronto: Westminster, 1899), p. 164.

7 See R. G. H. Cormack, Wild Flowers of Alberta (Edmonton: Queen's Printer, 1967), pp. 102-103.

8 See R. C. Hosie, Native Trees of Canada (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969), pp. 180-205, 96-106.

9 The Major (Toronto: McClelland, Goodchild and Stewart, 1917), p. 184.

10 The Doctor (New York: F. H. Revell, 1906), pp. 15-16.

11 The Sky Pilot in No Man's Land (New York: George H. Doran, 1919), pp. 9-10.

12 See Postscript to Adventure (New York: Farrar and Rinehart, 1938), p. 11.

13 See LHC, p. 11 or Ruth McKenzie, "Life in a New Land," Canadian Literature VII, pp. 24-33.

14 Patrol of the Sun Dance Trail (Toronto: Westminster, 1914), p. 297.

15 Painted Fires (Toronto: T. Allen, 1925), p. 119.

16 "Western Panorama: Settings and Themes: Robert J. C. Stead," Canadian Literature, XVII (1963), p. 47.

17 The Bail Jumper (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1914), pp.51&197.

18 This opinion is widely held by the major critics of Canadian literature. For a summary of the general feeling of critics toward all of these writers, see Carlyle King, introduction to Martha Ostenso's Wild Geese, pp. v-vii.

19 The Cow Puncher (Toronto: Musson, 1918), p. 169.

20 Dennison Grant (Toronto: Musson, 1920), pp. 127-128.

21 See McKenzie Porter, "The Purple Prose and Purple Life of Arthur Stringer," MacLean's Magazine, 76, February 9, 28-31; and Victor Lauriston, Arthur Stringer, Son of the North: A Biography and Anthology (Toronto: Ryerson, 1941), p. 96.

22 The Prairie Wife (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1915); The Prairie Mother (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1920); The Prairie Child (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1922). Hereafter cited as I, II and III. All citations will be to these three editions.

23 See III, p. 46 and The Mudlark, pp. 114, 261-263 for the optimistic dispositions bred in Stringer's women by the Alberta landscape.

24 As For Me and My House (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1941).

25 The Mudlark (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1931), p. 331.

26 The Shadow Riders (New York: John Lane, 1916), p. 12.

27 The Magpie's Nest (New York: John Lane, 1917), p. 107.

28 During the depression the production of prairie novels declined approximately 14% from the twenties according to B. B. Peel, A Bibliography of the Prairie Provinces to 1953 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1956), pp. 509-510.

29 The Flying Years (London: Collins, 1935), p. 31.

30 The High Plains (Toronto: Macmillan, 1938), and "The Desert," Queen's Quarterly, 43 (1941), pp. 216-232.

31 Out of the West Land (Toronto: Collins, 1944), pp. 194-195.

32 The Watch That Ends the Night (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1959), pp. 299-300.

CHAPTER III

GEORGES BUGNET

At the beginning of Chapter II, I mentioned the process whereby a regional literature unfolds. The writer both engages and transcends his subject matter, arranging and raising the details of region to matters of universal concern. The Anglophone writers discussed in that chapter failed to initiate this process by failing to observe with any objectivity the local details of their region. Only after the regional details have been engaged can one discuss the transcendence of these details into universal concerns. To import novelistic conventions appropriate to popular British and American fiction is not to transcend these regional observations. The engagement-transcendence process begins with a writer discussing his region's uniqueness. It ends with his demonstrating that his unique region has something vitally in common with the human community. For example, Joyce's Dublin is particularized very carefully so that its unique sounds, smells and geography are readily recognizable. But in almost all of his writing, Dublin becomes microcosmic, a kind of self-contained little world upon which the nightmare of world history is re-enacted.

In this chapter, two French novels by Georges Bugnet (b. 1879) will be examined in translation: Nipsya (1924)

and La Forêt (1935). In both fictions the careful engagement of local details is readily demonstrable. But only in his second novel is there evidence of a successful transcendence of these details. La Forêt is a model of regional fiction in the realistic tradition.[1] It represents what was possible for a man who, like his contemporaries, came to Alberta at the turn of the century; and who, like his contemporaries, attempted to write about what he saw. Chapter III, then, exists as a perspective on the fiction discussed in Chapter II, in which the fiction of Georges Bugnet is a measuring standard for realism, the most demanding form of regional fiction, it would seem, for the early Alberta regionalists. Three main questions must be addressed in this chapter. To what extent does Bugnet succeed, where his contemporaries failed, in accurately mirroring the raw materials of his region? How effectively does Georges Bugnet use these raw materials of his region to create an illusion of reality? And how successfully are these arrangements of regional sketches sublimated or widened in their implications to relate to the broader perspective of the human condition?

I have, in chapter II, said a great deal about racial insensitivity in the works of R. J. C. Stead, Arthur Stringer, Ralph Connor, Lovat Dickson and other writers as well. F. J. Niven alone seems to have attempted to achieve a comprehensive empathy, in other words, one which encompasses minority as

well as majority racial and religious groups in Alberta. And only Niven has given us a portrait of a Metis or an Indian which is at all convincing. When an author is not able or willing to explore with understanding the groups about which he has chosen to write, he imposes serious limitations upon his capacity as a regional writer. Ralph Connor's Alberta Indians are naturally 'a lot of bally savages' because he did not choose to engage them on realistic terms (in the Corporal Cameron series). Corporal Cameron's conquest over his self-doubt was what interested Connor. Arthur Stringer's orientals were all thieving 'chinks' and 'japs' because he did not find them useful for anything but props in his intrigues about Anglophile sophisticates in the wilderness. If a novelist, in writing of a region, commits himself to writing about its native or ethnic groups, he is not obliged to take up their cause in the name of the humanities. But as an artist he is obliged to see them in terms no less human than they are. Shortly, we will see how Georges Bugnet is able to do this with as much delicacy as Niven did in The Flying Years. First, however, the tendency of racist writings in Alberta should be enlarged upon.

It is likely that on all frontiers racism is endemic. This would be particularly pronounced in a region which has been settled by one predominent and conquering people (Alberta's English ranchers, for instance). One is inevitably going to be confronted with subconscious cultural opinions which--particularly to an outsider--are racist. Whether the

general W.A.S.P. outlook in Alberta is more racist than it is in any province is next to impossible to establish. But it does show in the literature of this region to a disconcerting extent. To indicate just what Bugnet was to confront when he came to Alberta at the turn of the century, I will quote some passages from one of the most authoritative histories of that time, authoritative, that is, for the southern half of the province. The history is C. M. MacInnes' In the Shadow of the Rockies (1930).[2] It covers the settlement years up to 1905 (the year Bugnet arrived) and inadvertently discloses the various racial attitudes displayed by the established pioneers who actually requested and sponsored MacInnes' history.

Characteristic of nearly all Canadian historians, MacInnes attempts to sympathize with the defeated, slaughtered, and disease ridden Indians who inhabited the province through the settlement years, but in his last chapter he refers to them as "untamed savages" (330). He is not suspicious of the white Americans who ranched in Alberta and who "soon made the best of Canadians" (330); but he is suspicious of the negroes, especially on the subject of music. "The negro had not yet become the dancing master of the world, and in the West the square dance was universal. Many consider that there was as much pleasure, and more art, in the quadrilles and schottisches as in the fox-trots and charlestons of the modern age, with their complete surrender

of everything traditional and indigenous to all pervading jazz" (327).

Georges Bugnet came to this land at the end of what MacInnes called a "heroic age" (330). The following passage refers to the (primarily) English ranchers, but could it not apply just as well to the supplanted Indian tribes? "We were all true lords and ladies in the West in those days; every man and woman made bread, whether it was with baking-powder, yeast, or sour dough . . . We were Nature's children, living in Nature's way and very close to Nature. We were not living for dollars--we seldom saw them. A man's wealth was in his horses or cattle, as in patriarchal days--he was valued as a man owning so many, and so we were at the beginning of things" (249).

In his reference to "Nature's children" and "the beginning of things" I see an implication that MacInnes and his ranching fraternity were lords of a sort of Eden. But the serpent in this Eden, oddly enough, was the Eastern European. "Apparently it made no difference what sort of people came to the country. So long as they were sufficiently above the anthropoid ape to count as people and thus swell the census returns" (241). And later he adds, "Western Canada could easily do without thousands of the offscourings of Eastern European peasantry, with their slave mentality and their traditions of oppression, if their places could be filled by young Englishmen of education and courage, such as the majority of remittance-men were. The West could well

afford to receive a few of the weaklings among them, knowing well that the majority had in them the blood that has made England the greatest colonizing country the world had known" (329).

MacInnes, it must be emphasized, is not alone in his judgements of these immigrants. Regarding the same generation of immigrants, R. J. C. Stead wrote his racist poem "The Mixer."[3] It is about the influx of new Canadians, the mixer being the western Canadian environment which receives these immigrants and converts them into citizens. The refrain which concludes each verse is "all but the yellow and brown." Here is a sample from stanza one:

> They are coming as the cattle that have nowhere else to go;
> They are haggard, huddled, homeless, frightened at--they know not what;
> With a few unique exceptions they're a disappointed lot;
> But I take 'em as I get 'em, soldier, sailor, saint, and clown,
> And I turn 'em out Canadians--all but the yellow and brown (15).

The above statements by Stead and MacInnes have nothing to do with critical judgements of fiction. That is, it does not follow that, because a man is susceptible to racially insensitive impulses, his fiction (Stringer's or Stead's for example) is aesthetically inferior. But as a commentator on the fiction of Alberta, I am committed to a discussion of the people who settled the province and of their image in fiction. This implies a discussion of <u>all</u>

Albertans who can come within the circumference of the novelist's imagination. I mentioned earlier that if the novelist attempts to render some of his 'less interesting' characters in terms less human than they are in reality, he is limiting his scope drastically. He is disqualifying himself as a comprehensive observer of humanity.

In this connection Arnold Kettle, though he overstates his case somewhat, makes some forceful comments. "The future of the . . . novel cannot be discussed in terms of the mere literary convention. It is a problem bound up with the whole future, social and cultural, of . . . people."[4] And with similar motives in mind, E. M. Forster speaks of great fiction which "reaches back to pity and love."[5] I will return to this problem shortly.

Much was said in Chapter II about the difficulties early Alberta writers had in coming to terms with intimate human relationships (love relationships usually). And nearly as much was mentioned about the various failures these writers encountered because of their imposition of eastern prejudices and novelistic formulae. Following is a scene from Georges Bugnet's Nipsya in which the above difficulties seem to be absent. A pretty young Métis girl walks naked among the rushes into a lake to bathe. She sees herself in the reflection and undergoes a kind of baptism of sexual awakening.

. . . though sure she was alone, she felt an inward

> disquietude that oddly surprised her. It was as though she had another self now, another and graver personality of which she was a little afraid.
>
> It was the first time that year that she had taken off all her clothes and she was astonished at her changed appearance. The previous summer, she had had lank limbs, bony hips, a flat chest, and a thin face; and now, as she knelt on the flat stone, her hands resting on the edge of it, what a lovely reflection met her gaze! She saw mirrored in the water, in the shadow of the reeds, an oval face, plump cheeks, a dimpled chin, a small red mouth, a delicately-shaped nose, very beautiful eyes with long dark lashes, and, if the mirror did not lie, a complexion extraordinarily white for a Métisse. Why, her whole body was changed! Her limbs had become rounded, her breasts softly curved.[6]

From that day on, the girl's "reflections upon, and instinctive perceptions of the moral life multiplied" (26). But the girl, whose name is Nipsya, is rooted in feelings, instincts and intuitions and not in moralizing and intellectualizing. The scene closes with a suggestive plunge into her own reflection, which transfers, quite appropriately, Nipsya's perplexing self-examination from thought to sensation. "Hitherto, she had believed herself mistress of every thought and action, and now, a silent inexorable force, which, nevertheless, she felt to be herself, was warning her against something, the nature of which she scarcely understood but dimly guessed.

She soon tired of this inward conflict, for she was not given to reasoning. Plunging into the water, she enjoyed herself with all her youthful energy and came out chilled since the lake was not yet very warm" (26).

Two things should be noticed about the bathing scene. First, Bugnet does not shy away from the mysteries of sexuality. To him, they are life-giving mysteries. To

Ralph Connor they are repulsive or embarrassing (see, for instance, his treatment of Iola in The Doctor). They are not mentioned even by F. J. Niven, who on most subjects was relatively frank and objective. Isabel Paterson and Arthur Stringer showed a genuine interest in them but saw them in sensational, or more often, sentimental terms. To write as frankly as Bugnet did, in the Alberta of 1924, took a relatively large amount of courage and understanding. Perhaps it was fortunate that he wrote entirely in French; he might otherwise have been strictly censored. Instead, he simply was not read. The second thing one should notice in the bathing scene is that Bugnet is attempting a sympathetic portrait of a Cree-speaking Métisse. For the first time in an Alberta novel, the protagonist is a member of a minority group. I will now turn to Nipsya for one of our first examples of an Alberta novel which tends toward realism in its approach to the natural and the human landscape.

A new problem presents itself to the regional writer who commits himself to the task of articulating the actions and speech of protagonists who are not articulate. In the following scene Bugnet's use of abbreviated speeches and of props like the buffalo robe is commendable. His use of this prop allows Nipsya's despair to come out by implication. The first two speakers are Nipsya's cousin Alma and Nipsya; the last is her wise old grandmother.

> 'We were afraid you had [sexual intercourse with Alec the trader, one of Nipsya's admirers], because

you were seen together so often, at this very spot. But what ails you, then?

'Nothing!'

'Is it possible that you really loved him? For the love of Heaven! Only speak!'

'Who told you those things? Are they true?'

'Vital told me . . . .'

She got up and went back to the shack.

She lay down on the bed with her face to the wall, and hid herself completely under the buffalo-robe.

'Whatever have you done to her, Alma?' her grandmother asked.

'I have just told her that Monsieur Alec is married. He is giving a dance tonight, and the news will be made public. I didn't think it would cause her so much pain.'

'Hunhun! Leave her!'

When Alma had gone, though very reluctantly, the old woman said: 'Are you going?'

But Nipsya made no answer. The robe remained as motionless as if it had covered a corpse.

'I was abandoned twice, myself, child, and I am living yet. We remember the joys when the sorrows are forgotten. He meant well. You looked for too much' (216-217).

The scene describes a genuine heartbreak for the young girl, but it ends abruptly and tearlessly. The whirl of emotions beneath the buffalo robe is left to our imagination.

In a scene where Nipsya is at peace with the world, having found in her husband, Vital, a source of contentment, Bugnet resorts to a natural image as a correlative for her emotional state. "Vital now spent his evenings beside Nipsya, holding her close in the lamplight. He would open a book and give her lessons. Sitting beside him, she did not feel the passion that Mahigan's ardent eyes had awakened in her, or the mental fascination that she had experienced with Monsieur Alec, but only a profound peace, solemn even to sadness yet infinitely sweet--the sort of peace that man ascribes to

rain-drenched woods after glorious storms" (260). The image of the rain-drenched woods is particularly appropriate for Nipsya whose name in Cree means 'willows.' She is the "perennial and evervarying" symbol of the Métis race (see especially 285-286).

Bugnet's eye is usually very receptive to nature. There is a well observed passage in which the fall is approaching around the Lac St. Anne area. Bugnet's panoramic view takes in first the obvious examples of vegetation, the birch, the spruce, the pine, the balsam and the willows. The general effect is gold on green (which is used today on so many commercial Alberta emblems). Then Bugnet's camera focuses on the minute details of the forest. "Nearer to where they sat, the grass was turning yellow and above it rose the stems of fireweed, whose pink seedpods had opened to release their masses of long, silken, silver threads. Large blue, starshaped flowers, like wild chicory, on stalks of bronzed crimson, mingled with tiny pink daisies, white-flowered goose-grass, and purple thistles, while close to the low-growing symphorine bushes with their numerous little snowballs, were the scarlet hips of the wild rose" (188).

Judging from the accuracy of his observations, it is not hard to guess that Bugnet took an interest in the flora of his region. In fact he is a recognized botanist, and has developed a tree and a flower strain, one of which bears his name.[7]

The above description is a simple panning technique which, in addition to describing nature for its own sake, lends an autumn atmosphere to the theme of fading love. But there is another way in which natural phenomena can become incorporated into a story, indeed can play a dominant role in the story. I am referring here to a more integral use of natural imagery in which light, natural objects, sounds or whatever, become objectifications of psychic phenomena.

The best example of this highly symbolic technique is part of the Mahigan subplot (233-249). I will first preface this account with a short plot summary of the chapter in question. Mahigan is a fiery-tempered Métis who, earlier in the book, attempted a seduction of Nipsya which, though unsuccessful, stopped just short of rape. In the chapter entitled "Mahigan's Atonement," Mahigan attempts to kill his own brother Mistatim when the latter finds him stealing the fur of a silver fox. He shoots Mistatim, only grazing his skull, and leaves him for dead. Mahigan then encounters Father Lozée on his way to baptize Mistatim's newly born infant. He confesses to the shrewd priest who demands angrily that God would desire "to see remorse in a bleeding heart" (243). Mahigan, who is ostensibly a non-believer, is stricken both by his conscience and by his own superstitious fear when, upon his arrival home he sees the strange, red lighting effects of the Aurora Borealis.[8] He doesn't understand this phenomenon and thinks it is God's way of demanding

his blood for the blood of his brother. He returns to the scene of the shooting, perceives wrongly that the spirits have taken away Mistatim's body leaving only a splattering of blood behind, and shoots himself. The scene of Mahigan's sacrificial death is on an island on Lac Majeau which is still uninhabited today. The island's flattened rocky top "gives it the appearance of an ancient altar, a dolmen erected on a desert plain" (236). The part of this incident to be cited is preceeded by much blood imagery and references to the supernatural Indian lore which still surrounds that country. Father Lozée has just made his condemnation of Mahigan.

> As Mahigan went on his way, night fell, the night of the Alberta highlands where shadow is yet luminous; a night that comes early and lingers late, rising from the snow-covered plains in the east to the snow-covered plains of the sky; a night when the Aurora Borealis holds carnival, undulating from horizon to horizon, her radiant tresses streaming behind her, translucent and powdered with stars.
>
> When Mahigan reached the edge of the bush, he did not turn around, did not look back at the islet that resembled an ancient altar, but plunged into the leafless gloom and soon afterwards arrived at his log shack.
>
> It stood in the middle of a long clearing where, in an earlier time, fire had destroyed the forest. The snow covered ground gleamed wanly in the darkness. It bristled with coal-black stumps and was strewn with black-ribbed skeletons over which the snow had laid pale shrouds.
>
> Usually, Mahigan did not worry about how things looked, but that night he sat at his door very late. He had no fire, for the soft breath of the Chinook wind was coming from the south-west in slow, warm puffs. Suddenly, he noticed that everything in front of him was taking on a reddish tint; the snow was turning pink; yet the after-glow had faded long ago.
>
> Coming from nowhere, something was beginning to kill the starry skies--something like a ghostly emanation, or

like the mist that drifts slowly from the mouth of one who sighs in a frozen atmosphere. But this must have been an endless sigh, an extraordinary sigh, for the mist gradually spread across the middle of the heavens, from west to east, and it was red.

Mahigan had never seen this rare phenomenon before. He felt uneasy. What could this mean?

From pale, transparent red, the mist gradually deepened, particularly in the centre, and formed a long streak almost parallel to the Milky Way. Through this purple mist, in unfathomable depths of deepest violet, the stars twinkled like astonished eyes.

From pale red, the mist rapidly turned bright red, almost scarlet. And how it glowed, palpitated, quivered! It moved as if instinct with life. Shapes crowned with fiery haloes appeared, unrolling themselves majestically, stretching themselves out in wavy lines, separating, commencing to turn in vast, sinuous curves, then breaking up and vanishing like sluggish eddies on the sheen of a broad stream.

At times, they seemed to descend earthward, letting fall a rain of crimson light that bathed the snow in roseate hues. Furtive gleams quivered like sudden, fleeting flashes of lightning in the distance, or the flash of a gun in darkness.

Hosts of weird apparitions, tinged with purple, descended slowly from the zenith of the heavens, unrolled themselves and, breaking up, spread out in vast waves that flooded almost the entire firmament. They emitted what looked like blood-spurts, and these gave birth to monstrous shapes that seemed to dart about, fly from horizon to horizon, then meet and mingle; they appeared and disappeared by turns, like powers of life in conflict with powers of death.

On the ground, near the hagard-eyed man, everything was bathed in an unearthly light. The black skeletons had assumed livid hues; the entire clearing seemed inundated by a tide of discoloured blood.

Mahigan, sitting motionless at his shack door, closed his eyes on that lake of discoloured blood and on top of the islet two mournful eyes in the pale, frozen face of a corpse . . . .

As if already appeased, the red aparitions gradually lost their bloody tints. Their brightness increased; they turned pink, then white, amber, gold, pale green, and mauve. Gliding back to the north, they formed a vast arc, tranquil and watchful. Rays of serene light radiated from it so that it resembled an immense fan.

The frozen, snow-covered lake lay bathed in the tranquil, silvery radiance of the northern lights. The century-old trees that peopled its shores had been wakened from their frozen slumber by the warm breath of

> the Chinook; their tops swayed with musical rustlings; their branches sang softly of this ephemeral resurrection (243-247).

To the regional scholar, Bugnet may seem to have amplified and dramatized the effects of nature somewhat; but Bugnet, always the scientist, has taken care to account logically for his eery supernatural effects. The "dolmen" or altar is merely a flat plain of rock. The red glowing light is an effect created by the Aurora Borealis. The 'corpse' disappears because Father Lozée has helped Mistatim back to his cabin. But to the tortured mind of a superstitious and guilt-ridden wouldbe murderer, these phenomena are the workings of the Great Spirit, the Kitse-Manito.

In the Mahigan underplot, Bugnet has successfully met the challenge of rendering the consciousness of an inarticulate man by resorting to his gift of lyricism. That is, Bugnet's sensuous imagery provides a series of symbolic correlatives to the superstitious Mahigan's guilt. The light and the snow, for example, are blood red. The trees at Mahigan's shack are dead or dying. Melville met the same challenge in a similar manner. In Moby Dick his Queequeg is an inarticulate physical presence, surrounded by a supernatural aura and described in sensuous terms. Faulkner's Mink Snopes, an inarticulate murderer, is also surrounded by a supernatural aura and described in colorful bursts of lyricism which have a primary appeal to the senses. Bugnet, like Melville and Faulkner, can resort to the suggestive

value of the supernatural, then, without being accused of believing in it as Mahigan obviously does. His "hosts of weird apparitions," his "lake of discoloured blood" are ghosts of the imagination. Such ghosts have never haunted the writings of any of Bugnet's contemporaries. And yet the writings of Melville, Hawthorne, Poe and Thomas Hardy, all of whom capitalized on this implementation of regional superstitions, were available to Alberta writers from the turn of the century on.

I have avoided the many weak points in Nipsya. Its major male protagonist, Vital Lajeunesse, is a mere mouthpiece for the Roman Catholic church and for the emergent forces of Métis self-assertation. His many speeches are often long and boring, reading like sermons or political analyses. And Bugnet, in his anxiety to empathize with the Métis cause, waxes sentimental in a disturbing number of scenes. In fact, he envisions a great future for the Métis nation, a future which history has unhappily not confirmed for this tragic people. Let us now turn to La Forêt, Bugnet's only work of fiction which adheres strictly to a realistic mode.

At the conclusion of Chapter II, I mentioned that the early Alberta fiction writers failed to achieve any kind of sustained realism because, perhaps as much as anything else, they could not penetrate beyond the facile optimism which was everywhere in early Canadian fiction. And in a sense,

this facile optimism reflects what these men sought and found in Alberta from the settlement years to the depression, and even later. In Nipsya, and in some of Bugnet's less mature stories, he is very optimistic, sustained by a religious faith which prevented him from straying from the safety of his (at times) complacent opinions. The unfortunate side of this sustaining faith is that in Le Lys de Sang, Siraf, "Le Pin du Maskeg", Voix de la Solitude and Nipsya, his own personal vision of "how things happened" was sometimes clouded. His last novel, however, La Forêt embodies, in Bugnet's opinion, how things happened in the homestead days in Alberta at the turn of the century. In an essay written five years after the publication of this novel, Bugnet explains his approach to 'how things happened,' in other words, his approach to realism.[9]

He begins by asserting that, among the hundreds of thousands of settlers who came to the wilderness of the Northwest from Europe, one in five was able to remain there without being defeated by the elements. This, of course, was before farms were mechanized. Since his own homesteading days, Bugnet has noticed that more care is taken in the choice and placement of homesteaders. "If my novel is one of the reasons for this, it will not have been written in vain" (393).

The novel "had to be particular enough to capture the attention of posterity and general enough to allow

people to gain an exact idea of the country and the difficulties that had to be surmounted by the majority of settlers" (343). So the book was highly autobiographical. It was written, however, by one of the few Europeans who succeeded in maintaining himself and his family throughout his long homesteading life. La Fôret had to have a tragic turn of events because, all around Bugnet, the facts dictated it. The particularized nature of his novel came from his daily journal. The generalized aspect came about as Bugnet attempted to transform himself and his family into "personnages ordinaires" and their heroic homesteading life into "une chose commune." He would allow them to be colourful but not heroic. Fighting forest fires, shooting rapids, escaping from floods, and driving through blizzards could only lead his personages into the "romanesque" or romantic adventure novel approach which is "less probing" (394). "The goal being to trace an image clear, complete, and true, even more true than history which, too concise, often engenders false or vague figures, I had to master any creative effervescence that I had, eliminate all that one could call romantic, in order to fasten myself to the most ordinary reality, to a verity which created no doubt" (394).

In the novel itself Roger Bourgouin speaks somewhat as Bugnet on the subject of the forest and its treatment by romantic writers of the past. The following comment, coming as it does in the midst of a lively intellectual debate with

Louise, his wife, is a somewhat unobtrusive comment on the book itself. ". . . Since Chateaubriand, and even Bernardin, we have acquired such depraved tastes that we appreciate nature far more if it's dead on the canvas of a picture or the pages of a book than in living reality. Instead of showing it as it is they have thought to embellish it by humanizing it. They've done nothing but deform it."[10]

La Forêt is the story of how a culturally sophisticated European couple (Roger and Louise) came, like Bugnet and his wife, to the Lac La Nonne area to homestead. The couple are courageous and intelligent and work hard amid great isolation. They have a baby born to them who dies after an accidental fall into a stream. And only then, after two years in the wilderness, does Roger admit to his wife that they are defeated. So they leave the forest, which like some ancient, fateful deity, has defeated them at last.

In the passages to be examined I will pay particular attention to two things: the way in which the wilderness and the major personages are characterized respectively as antagonist and protagonists; and Bugnet's creation of a believable domestic plot within this struggle against the wilderness. Bugnet encompasses both these considerations in the following scene.

> On this stream he had at first thrown a foot-bridge in the manner of the locale: the trunk of a felled tree which crossed onto the bank, and along side of which, for the security of Louise's feet, he placed two more. She had come to see the fall of the first great victims

> of the axe wielded by her husband. Before the fall of the first, an unreasoning fear sent a shiver through her entire being. And the next moment she believed that the giant tree was going to reach her with its high branches, as if it sought her out in its first vacillations so that it might rush upon her. Instinctively she fled, trembling without hearing the calls of Roger who laughed over her fright (53-54).

This foot-bridge is the setting for the death of Paul, their young son. So Louise's fear in this setting anticipates the story's tragic conclusion. The forest claims the young son, and from the start, to the fearful and sensitive Louise, it appears to seek her out. As well, one should notice the split in attitudes between Louise and Roger in this early scene, for this split provides the basis for the novel's domestic conflict and the novel's universality.

The split to which I refer is really the central debate running through all of Bugnet's writings. It is the debate between man the scientist and man the mystic; between man the pragmatist and man the fatalist whose vision sees a vanity in all action; between the entrepreneurial or pioneering spirit of modern man without humility for nature, and the humble, fearful spirit of man awed in the presence of a vast wilderness. This is Bugnet's debate with himself. The debate is most explicitly seen in Siraf (1934), an earlier fictional reworking of Voltaire's Micromégas into Western Canadian terms. But in La Forêt the terms of this same debate are presented in a living form, respectively in Roger and Louise; and their essentially domestic conflict

provides Bugnet with a form which withdraws from explicit commentary or debate.

Rather than debate, we have dramatic tension. Roger, like so many Alberta protagonists, and like Bugnet himself, comes to the province and then to his specific homestead because he is sure it is eventually going to be worth a fortune. His wife, with her natural prudence, is skeptical (see p. 39). Roger neglects his writing and his philosophical reading and becomes quite bestial in the eyes of his cultivated wife. He relies increasingly upon his muscles and his pragmatic pioneering instincts. But his wife, who is more religious in the first place, becomes increasingly subject to her own religious intuitions. This culminates in her mystical communion with the forest, a kind of fearful worship which takes her, at times, to the brink of insanity. Her husband assaults the forest while Louise fears it. By the end of the novel it is clear that Louise has a truer grasp on Bugnet's sense of reality. Or to put it another way, Bugnet the mystic dominates over Bugnet the applied scientist. And since Louise appears to speak for Bugnet the mystic, it is only logical that most of the narrative be filtered through her fearful, cultivated, religious sensibilities. Following is such a passage. In it, Louise is observing the apparent change in her husband's appearance and manner.

> He threw himself on the bed and tried to sleep there. Five minutes later he bounded out to the door, looking

> out at the interminable deluge with knitted eyebrows. One month and a half of physical activity had already made him into a vigourous machine, unyielding, a muscled animal, more quickly fatigued by rest than by work. Louise found him handsome. She grew proud of his new, somewhat brutal strength. And even if the love of her less attentive husband became more often forgetful, there came from this, more passionate returns. He was then like another man who appeared from within himself, and of whom she was a bit afraid (57).

The next excerpt is also delivered from Louise's point of view and shows the less passionate side of their love cycle. Here, Louise is pregnant and less beautiful to her husband who, at any rate, is happily occupied with the business of farming. At this point in the domestic conflict, Arthur Stringer would characteristically have introduced one of his exotic mistresses into the wilderness to create a triangle, and thus a motive for Duncan's infidelities and an obvious reason for Chaddie's heartbreak. The best example of this is the seductive Alsina Teeswater. But Bugnet's realism insists upon a wilderness without exotics. And so he simply resorts to the unsensational realities of his own autobiography.

> Still, at the roots of her being, she felt more sadness than anger. Bit by bit she noticed a growing indifference in her husband in which the incidents of tenderness came less and less. This, at first, didn't offend her. It fell into accord with her own dispositions. The progress of her maternity had made it desirable that Roger adhere to a platonic relationship. Far from tempting him, as before, with the instinctive art of seductions, she would disappear, plead fatigue, neglect her appearance. And she found that, in effect, with a wife whose amorous instincts have disappeared, the husband, disappointed in no longer finding any response to his own impulses, ceased in turn to seek her attractions. But she couldn't explain very well at first why her husband, being less

> aroused, would retire into a sort of lustreless affection which rather resembled a simple friendship as one would see among men, and which at times was not exempt from rebuffs, apparently without cause. 'He no longer seems to have any tenderness for me,' she thought. 'Every night he allows himself to kiss me as if it displeased him, and he scarcely even gives me one. God knows that I still do all I can for him' (132-133).

Only Arthur Stringer (and hardly even he) was able to speak of love in this way. And this is the only fiction that Bugnet wrote which did not encounter love in very sentimental terms. Even Nipsya falls far short of realism within Bugnet's own terms.

But, as I said before, La Forêt merely uses this simple, credible domestic plot to voice the conflict in Bugnet's mind over the subject of man invading the wilderness. How does a classical scholar and poet integrate this simple domestic plot and rustic setting into the pattern which accomodates all his thinking on this ponderous subject? That is, how does the student of Corneille, Racine and Voltaire, having rejected the romanticism of his own previous works for a basically realistic approach to nature, reconcile these diverse subjects and tendencies of his own mind? His own essay (previously examined) is of some help here.

> In our own time, in the European literature, it is always the eternal struggle of man against man . . . . Nature? Have they any respect for it? If they are concerned with it, isn't it simply to set off the stage-effects, to clarify the meaning of their own facts and gestures, to embellish their remarks, to swell out their sentiments, to give themselves the illusory satisfaction of seeing themselves as kings of the world? In ancient times there were the gods and man. Today, only man is important. Right now, where could he encounter the

> powers of nature? Not merely subdued, but chained up ravaged, devastated, it seems no more than a pitiful plaything. Over there, if they want to put a man up against nature, they have no other expedient (such as Daniel Defoe), than to place him outside of Europe. And even then this man is master. He becomes immense, and his shadow covers all the remainder. Poor Nature! What a deposition since the Greeks, who would venerate it so profoundly that each one of its forces to them appeared to be divine (396).

La Forêt is, in a sense, Bugnet's 'redeification' of nature, surely a very ambitious scheme. He invokes the classical style and the classical veneration of the gods (a veneration not inconsistent with his own religious beliefs) to help transcend the simple, rustic realties of homesteading. Bugnet adds that if man "doesn't go as far as the ancient Greeks and the Indians in imagining fairy-like beings to explain all these forces, he senses at least that they reveal an incomparable intelligence" (399). His concept of man humbled before natural gods is important here. It is, Bugnet says, a uniquely Canadian experience to feel one's minuteness amidst such an overwhelming natural wilderness. "While elsewhere man scarcely sees anything but his grandeur, in Canada he discerns as well his smallness" (397).

La Forêt is the only novel in which Bugnet sheds his Roman Catholic proselytizing. With the formula described above, then, he can write a human tragedy realistically while at the same time venerating his god without reference to the specific Roman Catholic rituals. Man defeated by nature is man humbled. Man humbled is man religious. Mahigan's death

in Nipsya is treated as a religious sacrifice. Paul's death in La Forêt is treated in the same fashion. The story "Le Pin du Maskeg" has a similar theme.

I have referred to the forest as a kind of antagonist in this novel. But seeing the forest as the successful combattant against the ravages of man, it is just as easy (and misleading) to call the forest the protagonist. Written in what Bugnet would call the classical style, following is a passage which describes a snow storm. Here one is able to see Bugnet's terror of Nature the antagonist as well as admiration for Nature the protagonist.

> The wind, which held them imprisoned, kept on augmenting its violence. By an opening melted in the hoar-frost on the window she looked at the dull sky. The invisible sun left a pale halo in the south, scarcely above the horizon. Sometimes this glimmer even disappeared completely, covered by immense flights of snow torn out by the storm at the surface of the lake and hurled right toward the cabin. In desolate thought Louise imagined that the tempest sought to shroud them under a thick winding-sheet, as if their tomb was already marked, here, at the edge of this forest which she sensed to be quite near, behind the tempest, and from which she could hear similar lugubrious clamourings in dreadful responses to the formidable singing of the tempest (124).

Perhaps only F. J. Niven's nature descriptions are as vivid as Bugnet's, and Niven's are not as integral to his plots as Bugnet's are. R. J. C. Stead's most competent descriptions of nature are of rain storms, and his best storm is the one at the conclusion of Grain, a Manitoba book. Stringer loves to work in sensational details, rosy dawns and sunsets, for instance, all of which create a somewhat

false tone when delivered in Chaddie McKail's narrations. And Ralph Connor's fertile canyons are simply badly observed.

Throughout most of La Forêt, Louise is the only character who recognizes the godliness or "incomparable intelligence" of the forest, and that the forest is capable of destroying them. Once in despair she cries, "It's the one that has torn my dress to bits . . . yes . . . this land, this forest that makes me a joyless soul always in revulsion" (136-137). She makes a fear crazed pact with the forest when her son disappears that if he is delivered to her alive, she would submit to the forest's clutches forever (see pp. 228-229). And during her first week in the forest she senses that "these immensities had a life of their own where hers was only an intrusion, minute, disdained" (33).

Finally in the emotionally charged death scene (the death of Paul, the baby), the last of the forest deities looks out upon Louise as she breaks down in despair. In the original French, her outburst is skillfully rhymed, like a Greek chorus. "'I saw it . . . I saw it right here . . . Its face was full of terror . . . its face was sandstone . . . it was gaunt . . . it was naked . . . I saw it . . . I saw it . . .' Roger watched her, overwhelmed, dazed, and he said: 'Who do you mean?' 'Death . . . its bones pierced out of its body . . . its eyes were dull and dead . . . I saw it . . . I saw it . . . '" (230-231; elipses are Bugnet's).

This death scene has been anticipated by Bugnet all along. The theme of ritual or sacrificial death to appease the forest deity was introduced earlier in the book. Louise, in a wistful mood, had attempted to reconcile her hatred and fear of the forest. And in this act of conciliation, she lapses into a dreamy state as if hypnotized by the forest. As she holds the baby on the bridge (where he eventually dies) she mutters:

> 'If he is in my arms, he is also in your arms. Since it it necessary, since he is yours as he is mine, I must commit him to you . . . to you who are also his mother . . .'
>
> She lowered her head to contemplate the precious gift that she made in the hope of uniting herself with the mute power whom she implored. And her eyes began to perceive at her feet, in the bossom of the moving waters as if she had slipped into it and became a part of it, her own image and that of the tiny sleeping body (153).

Then suddenly she comes to her senses and holds her baby fast to her, realizing that "the stream was like a tentacle, mobile and living, come out of the great forest to search for a prey" (153).

In the face of such an immense wilderness, human artifice and striving are paltry things. In another essay Bugnet states his personal credo: "Nature is a work divine, infinitely superior to all creations of the human spirit, and its grave tractate surpasses the things of this earth. It assigns to humanity its just place, which is minute."[11] Perhaps this explains in part why Bugnet chose to settle in Alberta. As the last province to be settled, it was one of

the few areas wild and vast enough to confirm his credo which, he insists, is distinctively Canadian. Louise recognizes this divine force within her when she says (to herself), "It has been given to me to create something greater than all human artifice could conceive" (144). She is, of course, referring to her newly born baby.

There are no explicit credos spoken in La Forêt, only striking images which suggest such a credo as the one quoted above in Bugnet's 1938 essay. Perhaps the theme of his novel is best summed up in the following fearful reverie of Louise's.

> Before the calm of that cold, as implacable as it was devoid of hate, before that immense enigmatic firmament, that enormous forest which had made her a prisoner here, Louise felt her heart fill with dread and desolation. So weak, so defenceless, facing those powers at once formidable and peaceful, she shuddered as she felt the endless emptiness. What would be the use of struggling against those calm and occult majesties to whom man and his works are nothing but fleeting and imperceptible atoms, swarming for an instant like animated dust--then re-absorbed, they and their works, under the epidermis of a minute globe which, before them and after them, follows its own destiny along an unknown road lost in unfathomable space? (138).

Georges Bugnet wrote the first realistic tragedy to come out of Alberta, thus breaking with the wild rose-garden school of Alberta fiction writers. Bugnet was the first writer to bring to Alberta regional fiction a classical education. He was therefore able to universalize his regional observations in terms of a greater classical (or Christian) pattern. The island on Lac Majeau is accurately

observed in Nipsya, but it takes on the aspect of a ritual death altar. The forest around Lac Majeau is certainly a 'real' enough Alberta forest, as is the stream which, in reality, flows from Lac Majeau to the Pembina River. But under Bugnet's treatment of them in La Forêt, they both speak to other men in other lands of a mighty deity long forgotten. Bugnet's observations of regional flora and fauna are those of a scientist. In this capacity, he is the most knowledgable creative writer in Alberta, living or dead. But Bugnet's integration of these natural observations into his fictional scheme is that of an artist (Besides the fiction I have mentioned, his short story "Le Pin du Maskeg" is a supreme example).

Bugnet, at his most mature, used nature imagery in two ways: as a correlative to the psychological or spiritual state of his characters; and as an approach to the god-like emanations he felt in the vast Alberta wilderness. As an example of the first use of natural images, I have cited Mahigan's tortured consciousness in Nipsya. And as an example of the second type, I have cited many passages which were filtered through Louise's sensitive mind in La Forêt. One dominant Alberta theme then (the vanishing natural wilderness), in which Georges Bugnet was supreme among Alberta writers, leads quite naturally into a second dominant theme, the coming of civilization. Bugnet's most acute insights into nature are invariably precipitated through the

(usually tortured) minds of his personages. And the natural wilderness becomes inseparable from the themes of human desolation, human frailty, human striving, and human love. Bugnet's work culminates with his publication of La Forêt. In it, his account of the marriage of Louise and Roger is as frank and unsentimental as it is unsensationalized. Only writers who wrote in Alberta from fifteen to thirty years after Bugnet were able to speak of this subject without many distorting illusions. I am referring to Edward McCourt, Ralph Allen, Christine Van der Mark, Henry Kreisel, and Denis Godfrey, all of whom had the additional benefit of an academic and relatively urban environment during their writing careers.

If Bugnet viewed the coming of civilization with a jaundiced eye, that is, as an assault on the natural deity, it was turned to his advantage. For with such a point of view, he came naturally to focus on the real children of nature, the Indians and Métis of early Alberta. Mahigan, Nipsya, and Nipsya's grandmother are among his finest portraits. And yet he had an equally acute eye on the emergent immigrant groups: the dominant English speaking majority (as best seen in his portrait of Monsieur Alec), and the European immigrants (Roger and Louise). No writer until Bugnet and Niven could characterize both groups without racist or preformed or misinformed opinions. For this reason, 1935 was a banner year for Alberta fiction. And of

the two publications that year (The Flying Years and La Forêt), Bugnet's novel was obviously the more probing of the two. His use of the wilderness, not as setting but as symbol, is far more integral than Niven's, as I have shown.

Almost 40 years since Bugnet's last novel was published, three promising Alberta novelists (W. O. Mitchell, Robert Kroetsch, and Rudy Wiebe) are now engaged in writing novels thematically related to those of Bugnet. All three of them attempt to encompass the West's historical continuum by casting one eye on the fading Indian and Métis past and the other on the emergent white groups of the present. Paterson, Stead, Connor, McClung, Dickson, Stringer and Eggleston--none of them had the objectivity or the foresight or the understanding to view this continuum in these terms. And so Bugnet rests as the pivotal figure in this study, the man who was first able to mould the raw materials of his region into a fiction writer's illusion of reality.

CHAPTER III

GEORGES BUGNET

Notes

1 The term 'realistic' should not be restricted to British or North American or Canadian literary traditions, as realism is as much (or more) a product of French fiction as it is of English fiction. For examples of this point of view, see Henry James "The Art of Fiction," in The Art of Fiction and Other Essays (1884; rpt. New York: Oxford University Press, 1948), pp. 4-27; Erich Auerbach, Mimesis (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1957), p. 481; Leslie Fiedler, Love and Death in the American Novel (New York: Criterion, 1960), pp. 126-127; and Harry Levin, "Realism in Perspective," in Robert Scholes, Approaches to the Novel (New York: Chandler, 1966), p. 101.

2 In the Shadow of the Rockies (London: Rivington's, 1930).

3 The Empire Builders (Toronto: William Briggs, 1908), pp. 15-20.

4 An Introduction to the English Novel (London: Hutchinson University Library, 1967), II, p. 177.

5 Aspects of the Novel (London: Edward Arnold, 1927), p. 126.

6 Nipsya, trans. Constance D. Woodrow (New York: Louis Carrier, 1929), p. 25. Subsequent references are to this edition.

7 Bugnet has developed an original strain of pine tree later acquired by the provincial government. And out of the native Alberta Rose he bred the now famous 'Thérèse Bugnet Double Rose.'

8 Says Bugnet, "I saw that rare kind of Aurora Borealis at midnight in November, 1918. None of my neighbours had seen it." From a personal letter I received from Bugnet, August, 1972.

9 "La Forêt," Le Canada Français, 27 (Janvier, 1940), 389-401. Subsequent page references to this study are in my text.

10 La Forêt (Montréal: Editions du Totem, 1935), p. 99.

11 "Quelques Reflexions sur la Poésie," in Voix de la Solitude (Montréal: Editions du Totem, 1938), 20.

CHAPTER IV

THE POST-DEPRESSION YEARS: EARLY SUCCESSES

I have chosen five Alberta fictions to represent the post-depression era (1939-1960). Like Bugnet's La Foret and Niven's Flying Years, each of these novels displays an acute sensitivity to region. This is not to say that these are all good examples of realism. The Kite, for instance, is in certain ways an antirealistic novel as I shall demonstrate. But these novels were selected because each one of them has an accurately mirrored Alberta setting (socially and geographically), and each one contributes to the corpus of regional myth which is now taking on a distinctive shape in Alberta. They are good examples of regionalism.

It is significant that in these fictions, there is a westward movement in the progression of the plot. In all cases this movement involves a search for something better on the part of the major characters. In The Kite, by W. O. Mitchell, David Lang returns to his Alberta foothills and communes with his own boyhood. In Music at the Close, by Edward McCourt, Neil Fraser heads west for his education (in Edmonton) and for a job (in Calgary), and goes further west to find a romantic escape in the Banff Rockies. In Tay John, by Howard O'Hagan, the legendary hero moves north and

west away from civilization. In Peace River Country, by Ralph Allen, the Sondern family are fleeing to Alberta from Saskatchewan to escape the drought and its demoralizing side-effects. And in In Due Season, by Christine Van der Mark, the movement is north and west for Lina Ashley's family. In this case, the search for better farmland is ostensibly the reason for the move.

One of the migratory phenomena of prairie history since the beginning of the depression, even before, has been the westward flow of families in search of a more prosperous or more meaningful life. I believe that the five novels reflect this phenomenon unconsciously. I will return to this westward (or northwesterly) progression throughout this chapter.

Unlike nearly all of the pre-war novels, these have been greeted with a certain amount of critical success.[1] In demonstrating why I think this relative success is justified, I will attempt to assess to what extent the faithful portrayal of region is a factor, taking this westward movement as a beginning point. In Nellie McClung's Painted Fires the westward journey to Alberta was associated with three things: the false lure of riches, the romantic escape from self, and the conflict which arises between the espousal of the land's potential for wealth and the espousal of its natural beauty. These themes receive an extensive treatment in the postwar novels to be examined. McClung's 1925 novel typified the approach to these themes which were handled (with varying

success) by Stringer, Paterson, Stead, Eggleston, Niven, Dickson and others. Helmi's flight westward, one should note, was arrested by the Alberta Rockies. Howard O'Hagan, Edward McCourt, W. O. Mitchell and Ralph Allen are interesting in their fictive use of this regional resource. Only Christine Van der Mark, among the five postwar writers, has chosen to avoid the Rockies in her fiction. For her, the route of escape is the North as in the case of McClung's earlier novel Purple Springs. The western (and the northern) journey motif, as it is handled by all of these writers, is really a variation on Helmi's question: "If one kept going, going, going, would every disagreeable thing fall away, every sin and every sadness?" (119).

Ralph Allen's novel, Peace River Country (1958), is not about the Peace area, nor is it primarily an Alberta novel. But his treatment of Alberta as a mythical Promised Land, to which his Saskatchewan family flees, is obviously of great importance to this study. Most of the action takes place in Elevator, "the small town of Saskatchewan, a town much idealized by those who have never lived there, much moved-away-from by those who have, and much mourned by people of both kinds" (42).

To the protagonists of the novel, Bea Sondern and her two young children Harold and Kally, Alberta holds the promise of a prosperous life and a drought-free, mild climate. To Chris Sondern, Bea's alcoholic husband, Alberta holds the promise

of a farm where he will at last be re-united with his family. For Amelia Chatsworth, Alberta has Banff, a vacation paradise where she might cloister her daughter Vannie from life. For Vannie Chatsworth, who, like the Sonderns, aspires to go to Peace River, Alberta holds the promise of an adventurous dream. There is a long conversation in Chapter I between the two children and Bea about the land to which they are headed. Bea comments first on the number of Saskatchewan families that had migrated to the Peace region, then she goes through the names of the towns with the children (and these names are not fictitious).

> 'Names! If you want names! You never heard such names. The first people that went up there saw it was a different kind of country and when they started picking the names. . .'
> 'What are some of them?' he asked, suddenly almost eager.
> 'Oh, let me see. I don't suppose I'll be able to remember all of them . . . . there's a Progress and even a Rio Grande. And a Valhalla and I think, yes, I'm sure, there's a Bonanza.'
> 'Gee, and down here the best names they can think of are names like Dobie and Oxbow and Carnduff' (14-15).

In a very simple way, Allen has allowed historical fact to accomodate regional fiction. He sets up a contrast between selections of Alberta and Saskatchewan village names. And he does not, of course, mention other Saskatchewan names such as Plenty, Bounty, Forward or Cadillac (also real villages in Saskatchewan) because they would detract from his pilgrimage-to-the-Promised-Land theme. Ralph Allen's Canadian reading audience doubtless knows that the Promised Land myth has

flourished far more in Alberta than in Saskatchewan, so he confirms their expectations for the purpose of his theme.

Peace River Country is a fairly realistic novel, committed more to the explosion of myths than to the perpetuation of them. As the Sondern children and their courageous mother arrive in Calgary "through a series of crevices in a plateau of oil tanks and warehouses," Alberta dream and nightmare are allowed to vie ironically with each other. This is the last page of the book, and one has strong doubts as to whether the family will ever achieve prosperity or even reach the Peace River country. But one sees as well that, as they reach Calgary, they have found a source of guarded hope in their own courageous striving. If there is a Peace River country or a Promised Land, Allen assures us that it is a country of the soul.

Christine Van der Mark's In Due Season (1947) is a novel of the Peace region (or nearby), and her major personages reach their chosen destination,a homestead about fifty miles east of Peace River. Like Peace River Country, this novel portrays the struggles of a woman and her two children escaping the drought of the thirties to a Promised Land. An important difference in the two stories is that, while in Peace River Country the Sondern family achieved a spiritual victory in the midst of their financial distress, Lina Ashley's family encounters spiritual distress in the midst of their

growing prosperity. And because, according to both novelists, crises of the spirit are far more critical than crises of the pocketbook, Peace River Country is a far more optimistic novel than In Due Season.

The inscription to In Due Season is from the book of Galatians (vi, 7): "Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." In one sense the story recounts the growth of the community of Bear Claw. In another sense it recounts the growth of Lina Ashley's very successful farm. And in a third sense, it recounts the growth and destruction of her spirit. Ms. Van der Mark views her biblical inscription without irony. The community of Bear Claw grows and prospers because its people worked hard and the land was good. Lina prospers more than any of them because she is more aggressive. And on these two levels of plot progression, the harvest that is reaped is a genuine product of the Northern Alberta soil. There was never a drought in Northern Alberta during the depression.

> But it was good land. The day after Jack and his family had driven away, rain came, and they could rest for a little while. Grey and slanting, the rain seeped into the new-turned earth. What matter that their money was practically gone? They had almost forgotten what a slow steady rain was like. Everywhere, greenness rested the eyes. The croaking of frogs, the whistling of birds accompanied the music of falling rain. Lina could not stay inside, but dressed in old clothes and a slicker of Benjie's, she walked about,setting every available pail and pan to catch soft water. The next morning it was still raining as she rode along the trail on Queen with the colt following. She was taking time to explore and to see what lay beyond the bend in the road. She thought of

> other springtimes she had known, with their blizzard of dust, and brown burnt prairie grass, and the few flowers blown to bits in storms. Now she rode through the grey sheets of rain, just to feel its cool sweet freshness. The trees lifted their leaves like faces to it, and every leaf was shining with moisture. Flowers she had never seen blossomed along the path, and every cup was filled. Queen slithered in the mud, but it did not matter. The woman did not care if she was covered with mud, or where she went, or if she were to come home drenched to the skin (35).3

On the first two levels of plot progression, as I have shown, the community and Lina's farm prosper. But on a third level, the spiritual level, Lina's harvest is one of desolation. In her ambition to have the finest farm in the Bear Claw area she sacrifices first her father, who dies during her bid to file a homestead; then her estranged husband, who dies at the hands of Mike Olenski, Lina's sworn enemy from his childhood; then her daughter, who runs off with her Métis boyfriend in a blanket wedding; and finally her little boy, who gravitates toward his older sister, Poppy, and her boyfriend, Jay, and away from Lina's authority.

The dream and the nightmare of Lina's pilgrimage to the Promised Land are presented simultaneously just as they are in Peace River Country. The last scene of the book, although it is only one of dozens of poignant scenes in this novel, is a good example of this simultaneous presentation of Ms. Van der Mark's two-edged theme. Lina is in the midst of scolding her young boy Benny for innocently helping his sister to escape with Jay. The reference to Olenski's acres ties

in with an earlier encounter with a Ukrainian family which fell prey to bad luck, their own incompetence, and Lina's shrewdness.

> 'And I was thinking you was like Daddy, like Benjie.' The woman's quivering face went hard. 'Why, holy bald-headed! You're nothing more'n another of Sym Ashley's brats, that's what you are. I can't stand the look of you. Get out of my sight!'
>
> White and trembling, the little boy ran sobbing into the next room. For moments, the woman stood transfixed in the darkening kitchen. Then she moved woodenly to the door, and walked with dragging footsteps across the yard to the cattle.
>
> Breathing the fresh cool air was like dipping into cool waters. The land was in twilight now, with grey shadowiness over the acres of young wheat, and the pasture, and the untouched timber beyond. Shadows would be gathering over the hayland too, with its new growth of luscious grass, and over the acres that were once Olenski's where his old shack was tumbling into decay. The whole land lay tranquil, beautiful, utterly still. A single star shone in the clear sky above the tree-tops.
>
> At the water trough clustered the strong forms of the work-horses, and in the little pasture by the yard, the bells of the mares with their colts tinkled among the willows. The bulky, awkward bodies of the cattle lay humped near the gate. The beast nearest Lina turned a horned head with a low, plaintive note. Lifting a pail from the ground, the woman kicked the cow to its feet.
>
> Crouching, she began mechanically to milk (362-363).

There is, in this passage, a commentary on the coming of civilization to the region. In it, we note that Lina Ashley moves 'woodenly' and 'mechanically'; but just previous to this scene she has told Tommy, who drove an automobile to her house, that "it's still a country for horses" (328). She has, perhaps unwillingly, become a part of the mechanistic age. But her daughter Poppy escapes with Jay to the north country on a horse. They are two of the most compassionate people in

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the novel, therefore contrasting with the hardened Lina. In Lina's reduction to a mechanical function, then, and in Jay and Poppy's highly romantic escape from white civilization, Ms. Van der Mark views the material harvests of the mechanistic age with a grave sense of loss. From Allen and Van der Mark, then, we have seen two examples of fiction in which the Alberta dream is rendered in images of bounty and prosperity. Because both authors have remained relatively steadfast in their realistic approaches, they have viewed this dream as either unattainable or attainable at great cost.

It is once again helpful to look at the striking similarities in the plots of both novels in order to understand how both artists have accommodated the environmental influences of their region. Chris Sondern and Sym Ashley are close counterparts in this regard. Not only are both the chronically unsuccessful husbands of resourceful wives, but both die violent deaths after their estrangement from their wives. And more important, both are dreamers who seek the fulfillment of their unattainable dreams on a homestead in the Peace River country. In both cases their tragedies comprise subplots to the main flow of the novel's action. But in Edward McCourt's Music at the Close (1947), the tragedy of the dreaming man comprises the main plot. Here the Alberta dream recedes appreciably in the wake of McCourt's version of the Alberta nightmare.

One of the obvious dangers of a regional thesis lies in the implicit value judgements imbedded in regional theory. For example, a cardinal virtue of regional fiction is its scrupulous attention to the 'physical' details of an environment: diction, landscape, historical landmarks and folk traditions. After all aesthetic questions have been considered by the critics, the regional scholar is still apt to say, "But does he do justice to my province?" The danger I refer to, then, is one of over-emphasizing the importance of regional criteria in literary criticism.

From the point of view of the regional literary scholar alone, McCourt's Music at the Close is as close to the Great Alberta Novel as any novel has come. McCourt doesn't have Ms. Van der Mark's gift for characterization. Her Lina Ashley, for instance, is a deftly drawn, sympathetically conceived protagonist. McCourt has no Lina Ashleys. Nor has he Ralph Allen's flare for caricature or diction. Nor has he the poet's habit of mind, as does Georges Bugnet, to respond lyrically to the landscape. But McCourt, who grew up on the prairies, has a very strong sense of region. He is therefore able to insert his protagonist, Neil Fraser, into a well-visualized historical continuum (1906 to 1940). From this we come away with a feeling for the times. His historical knowledge helps him to portray the impact of region upon consciousness within a fixed temporal scheme.

Allan Bevan speaks of this novel as one about "the lost generation of the prairies, the generation that succeeded the real pioneers with their enthusiasm and their sense of building a new world."[4] Both Bevan and McCourt (along with historians like C. M. McInnes or novelists like Stead and Connor) appear to agree that the pioneering phase was an heroic one, and if not, then certainly a very meaningful one. In the following scene, Neil is thinking about his Uncle Matt who had just died. It is McCourt's eulogy to the heroes of the older generation.

> And yet, as he reviewed in his mind Uncle Matt's drab life, Neil knew that by comparison with numberless millions with whom the earth had teemed, Uncle Matt could count himself blessed. He had never known hunger, he had always had a roof over his head and enough clothes to warm his body. If he had ever endured great spiritual anguish it had left no visible mark on him. And he had married a woman who for fifty years had walked beside him in unquestioning and inflexible loyalty. Judged in the light of the common lot of man, Uncle Matt's lot had indeed been a happy one.
>
> And as he stood looking out of the window across bleak, snow-covered fields, Neil told himself that Uncle Matt's life had not been devoid of beauty. For he had loved the land with an inarticulate, single-minded intensity, and perhaps any other emotional outlet would have been superfluous. It was no small thing to be on intimate terms with the earth itself, no ignoble life that was dedicated, however blindly, to the nourishing of life. And now that he was dead, Uncle Matt would be at home in the earth he loved (131-2).

Uncle Matt lived during the generation which Ralph Connor and R. J. C. Stead described in such stirring, heroic terms. Allan Bevan, in the same introduction, adds a note on this subject.

> Canadian fiction in the main belongs in the realistic tradition, and the pioneers who appear in early novels are probably only slightly idealized. If the memories of my own uncles and aunts can be trusted, most of the actual pioneers who survived the first years of hardship and loneliness did have the heroic qualities of courage, strength and toughness. I grew up on stories about three-day blizzards, raging prairie fires, gloomy sod shacks, of mosquitoes, stubborn oxen and wicked broncos. The middle-aged men and women who had lived through the pioneer years looked back with a mixture of awe and pride at the "early days." They remembered not only their own struggles but the courage, co-operation and mutual support of their fellows (9).

The heroes (if heroes they were) of this era in Alberta history lived contemporary with and no doubt provided fictional models for the likes of Corporal Cameron, Raven, Shock McGregor, Arthur Moore, 'The Duke,' 'Bronco Bill,' Gwen, and other such square shooters from Ralph Connor's Alberta canon. And regardless of how badly conceived these characters were, they bespeak a kind of heroic consciousness which pertains to the homesteading era. Such a consciousness is Neil Fraser's inheritance in Pine Creek. He perceived the life around him through the eyes of a romantic. His formative years are imbued with this vision. Music at the Close is concerned primarily with Neil Fraser's attempt to perpetuate this heroic vision beyond the era to which it pertains.

Apparently for Wilfrid Eggleston, adherence to this vision was not difficult. The High Plains reads like an early draft of Music at the Close but a draft in which the old optimism dominates the tone. It is likely that McCourt drew on Eggleston's plot for the bare bones of his own plot; they

were close acquaintances for many years. Eric Barnes and Neil Fraser are both caught in the grip of the depression. Both, as boys, are tutored by literate but debauched recluses whom they worship as heroes. Both love, then lose, the girl of their dreams because they tend to place her on a pedestal. And in both books, regional history is drawn upon to concretize the novels' settings. Eggleston's subplots and his main plot, however, conform to the biblical prophesy from Isaiah which predicts that the wilderness will become a fertile garden. Heroes not only exist, they collect their just rewards.

McCourt is far more sensitive than his mentor, Eggleston, to the illusions bred by pioneer optimism. His own generation of Alberta farmers' children belonged to the great wave of men and women who sought to make a living in the towns and cities rather than suffer the economic and cultural limitations of farm life. The threat of physical danger from the elements, or from the lawless days[5] of the early settlements, was replaced by the threat of economic deprivation. Parallel to this displacement of environmental threats is of course the displacement of frontier courage by more complex social ethics (collectivism, union solidarity, 'social' credit, for example). So McCourt collapses the heroic ethic which had been conditioned by the now vanished frontier. A good example of the vulnerability of this heroic vision is to be seen in Neil's perception of Charlie Steel and Helen Martell.

> The instinct of hero-worship, always strong in him, had lately been stimulated by his reading, which had peopled his imagination with a thousand strange and splendid creatures of romance. Now when he read of Arthur and his knights it was not surprising, perhaps, that all the knights looked very much alike-- tall and slim under their armour, fair-haired and blue-eyed, with little fair moustaches,-- and that the women of Arthurian romance were tall and dark and red-lipped, with slender white hands and pointed nails. When Guinevere and Launcelot rode together they looked for all the world like Helen Martell and Charlie Steele (56-57).

Neil is too young to see that these two people are made of common clay: Charlie a charming ne'erdowell, Helen a promiscuous beauty. In one of his fantasies about the couple, Neil imagines that he has rescued Helen from a stampeding herd and, having received Charlie's thanks, dies a hero's death. Here is the romantic myth-making process at work in the west.

> There was no hope of escape. With a muttered 'so long,' he spread-eagled himself over Helen's prostrate body, and the herd swept over him. Although pounded by a thousand hoofs, he did not lose consciousness-- the scene merely transferred itself to a hospital where Neil, from a vantage point near the ceiling, was able to observe himself stretched out on a bed, white-faced and swathed in bandages through which the blood showed in great round spots of red. Helen and Charlie were kneeling by the bedside and most of the Pine Creek community hovered respectfully in the background. 'You saved her, Neil,' Charlie Steele said, and choked suddenly.
>
> Neil saw himself move ever so slightly and lift a hand so heavily swathed in bandages that only an occasional fingertip was visible. 'That's all right, Charlie,' he said, speaking with great difficulty. 'Sorry if she-- got-- shaken up-- shouldn't have fallen!'
>
> A gush of crimson flooded his lips and he turned his face to the wall. Helen bowed her head and the scene became a funeral procession in which the coffin was mounted on something that was a cross between a gun-carriage and a democrat, covered with a Union Jack and banked with flowers. And Helen Martell and Charlie Steele walked

> close behind with all of Pine Creek following after. There were, of course, numerous variations of the dream possible, but the basic pattern was always the same (57-58).

It is amusing to compare this fantasy with some of Connor's death scenes from the Alberta novels: Raven's death in The Patrol of the Sundance Trail, Barney Boyle's death in The Doctor, Barry Dunbar's death in The Sky Pilot. The similarity in emotional tone and heroic trappings between Neil's imagined death scene and Connor's 'real' death scenes is very strong. What is important here is that, according to McCourt, such melodramatic cartharses are only possible within the realm of fantasy. Neil only realizes this fact fully as he is dying on a battle field at the end of the novel. In McCourt's cowboy adventure novel, The Flaming Hour (1947), the heroic verities are still very much alive. But this is a novel about an heroic age, and an example of escape reading besides.

Neil's tragic entanglement with the heroic past comes out in other ways as well. His literary favourites are romantic pieces from Tennyson, Byron, Noyes, Swinburne, De La Mare, and Rupert Brooke. T. S. Eliot serves only to plunge him into despair. In love, he is a combination between a Ralph Connor muscular Christian and a Prufrock, who can engage the opposite sex only through fantasies. He is an athletic, non-drinking champion of romantic virtues. He falls in love with Moira Glenn; and when the earthy hard-headed Gil Reardon makes advances toward her (much like Corporal Cameron

protecting Nurse Haley), he fights Gil, calling him a "filthy cur" (112).

I mentioned McCourt's historical sense of region. Neil Fraser, during his formative years, has aligned his imagination with the images of the romantic past. Throughout the novel, he must test his romantic ideals out on the obstacle course of reality, McCourt's reality: the Alberta of 1918 - 1940.

The popular expression for Alberta during these years is 'Next Year Country,' and McCourt uses this term suggestively throughout the story. The expression implies both future hopes (usually for a better crop) and present failure. To those who act realistically in the novel, like Uncle Matt, Next Year Country is a myth (see especially p. 41). But for the dreamers like Neil, Alberta is an elusive Promised Land. In 1919 the Promised Land was in Pine Creek: "For a month or more a thin stream of newcomers moved north over the ferry into the promised land. Most of them were soldier settlers being established on almost worthless farms under a grandiose government rehabilitation scheme, and nearly all doomed to years of struggle and disappointment. It was another year like the preceding, a year of feverish optimism, of determination to win from the land everything it had to offer while the rewards were worthwhile" (54). And enough farmers, like the Rheinharts and the Schultzes, were financially successful

to perpetuate the myth into the relatively prosperous 1920's. Neil inherits this land fever around his twenty-first birthday in 1927 and speculates with his crops until he goes broke in 1930. Then the myth was perpetuated by speculators like Jim Lowery. In the hungry thirties, as Allen and Van der Mark showed us, Peace River was the destination of dreamers like Neil.

> His imagination had leapt over three hundred miles of prairie and parkland to the cool banks of the smooth-flowing Peace, so unlike the turbulent, yellow Saskatchewan, where his acres stretched through miles of woodland and pasture and wheat field, and where his green and white colonial house, standing on a rising point of ground, commanded a magnificent sweep of water stretching into remote, purple distance. Yes, Johnny was right. The promised land lay north. And Neil was going! (183).

But Neil doesn't go. He remains victimized by his own romantic ideals and victimized by the depression of the thirties. He is drawn into the social conflicts of the depression by the massive unrest around him. A right-wing racist organization known as the Defence League of Canada, dedicated "to Anglo-Saxon ideals" (147), attempts to recruit him to fight the labour unions. There are riots which the League suspects are communist inspired. Following is an analysis of the whole situation by Gil Reardon. His voice may not be that of the objective social analyst, but it is a typically Alberta reaction to an era of Alberta history, and somewhat shrewd in its cynicism.

> 'Neil, the farmer is a great guy. In a lot of ways he's the best guy on earth. But as far as he's concerned, only one thing matters, wheat! As long as there's a market for his wheat he doesn't give a hoot about the industrial worker-- doesn't know he exists. But once the bottom drops out of the wheat market, he can be led by the nose by any political racketeer who has a formula for upping the price. It never occurs to him that he and the worker are caught in the same trap. And you're a farmer, Neil. You've got chaff and dust and tractor oil in your blood. There's no market for wheat-- so you swallow a line that wouldn't fool an intelligent six-year-old. Chase all the Reds like me back to Russia-- restore the individual economy-- and the price of wheat will go up! And if the miners live on the thin borderline of starvation-- if their wives are old at thirty and their kids rickety and half-starved and half-frozen-- what's the difference so long as the Bolshies are driven out and the price of wheat goes up! Neil-- you make me sick' (154).

McCourt's historical panorama moves to a Social Credit rally in 1935, and we see Aberhart and Manning offering political visions to the seekers of the Promised Land.

> Neil did not hear very much of what William Aberhart said. He was too much preoccupied with the spectacle that he was witnessing-- the spectacle of a people gripped by something approaching hysteria in the presence of the prophet of a new age. He had no power to look into the future; he could not see that the big man on the platform, enunciating a theory which sounded like wildest fantasy, would in fact be elected to office with one of the biggest majorities ever accorded a provincial party; he could not see that when the big man passed from the scene his power would be transmitted to the slight, frail youngster who at one time came forward almost timidly to participate with his leader in a dialogue intended to make clear the basic principles of Social Credit. But seeing what was happening before his eyes,what had already happened in other parts of the world became not merely credible but logical. Here was a people, impoverished, frustrated, dangérous. Here was a man who promised them material salvation in the form of twenty-five dollars a month. How many in the huge crowd really expected to receive twenty-five dollars a month if the Social Credit party came into power Neil had no way of telling; he suspected not many. But in Bible Bill Aberhart, the man with the pale expressionless face and the sleepy eyes,

> they saw leadership-- they saw the prospective annihilation of whatever had been responsible for their frustration and they were prepared to follow him with a kind of desperate trust in the wisdom and the strength of the prophet because they no longer trusted their own. They were a people baffled, beaten but not passive, unwilling to accept what had happened to them as either the will of God or the consequence of their own follies. And in that refusal, thought Neil, lay the secret of their capacity to endure and to fight (180-181).

None of the passages which I have quoted from this novel are remarkable for their felicity of style, their character revelation, their lyrical beauty or their mastery of narrative technique. Ms. Van der Mark, for instance, has more to offer in essentially artistic categories such as these, and yet I have devoted far more space to McCourt for one important reason: McCourt is the first Alberta writer to have chosen for his region the entire province of Alberta. He has attempted to endow it with a distinct character: the Promised Land with enough evidence of prosperity to maintain its own myth, the desperately optimistic myth of Next Year Country. Only F. J. Niven had done any extensive historical research before he wrote his Alberta novel, and Niven does manage to capture the spirit of the times in several of his scenes. But there is no evidence that Niven chewed his material, digested it, and allowed it to flow naturally from the actions of his characters. Unfortunately, at times, his characters regurgitate historical journals. McCourt's advantage is that he was raised in the province and drew from personal experience to give credence to his setting. But he too suffers

from the same affliction that limited Niven so seriously. McCourt was an historian as well as a novelist. Often his characters, Neil and Gil for example, would speak more like social and political analysts than displaced farm boys. In the two scenes just cited, Gil's denouncement of the farmers and Neil's observations of a Socred rally, McCourt the historian can be seen to be in conflict with McCourt the novelist. These lapses are less frequent in McCourt's case than in Niven's. But in In Due Season, for example, they are almost totally absent.

The value of Music at the Close rests in its moving, historically authentic portrait of the impact of region upon the aspirations of a dreamer. It announces the end of the wild rose-garden school of Alberta fiction. It has collapsed the heroic myth of the prairies, but in a manner artistically inferior to Ms. Van der Mark's first novel.

It is illuminating for the regionalist to compare Music with McCourt's next novel, which is set in Saskatchewan: Home is the Stranger (1950).[6] McCourt's Norah Brandon is no less a romantic distorter than Neil Fraser. But unlike Neil, who is lured from illusion to illusion in Alberta, Nora looks in vain for a setting for her romantic illusions. And true to realistic Saskatchewan fiction, she can not find it. The following passage illustrates first the prairie desolation which assaults her spatial imagination and then the romantic Irish terrain's effects on her memory.

> Somewhere she must have crossed a height of land imperceptible to the eye. Now the prairie sloped away below her, mile after lonely mile, flat, monotonous, dead. Not dead really, and not altogether flat, but that was how it seemed, like a great sheet of parchment unrolled under the blue sky. Clusters of buildings here and there made little bumps on the surface, but many of the buildings, she knew, housed no living things except field-mice. A vast desolation, really; and that was as it should be, for the prairies were a battle-field where men risked their hopes against the forces of the earth itself. In Ireland a landscape gave you no sense of conflict, not even, she supposed, in the evil days with the green hedges and shady woods. There the land itself-- at Innishcoolin, anyway-- was serene, companionable. One looked upon it with a feeling of comfortable intimacy, at the green old hills, the lochs not often ruffled,the tranquil lived-in farmsteads that had stood for generations. The quiet fields harboured no violence, no animosity towards man. But this new land was primitive, barbaric;hostile to man's encroachment. Thinking so, Norah said to herself, I'm being silly again, and tried to find comfort in the colours of the tiger-lily splashed violently along the roadside, in the clear blue and white of the cloud-flecked sky (95-96).

In the novels discussed, by Ralph Allen, Christine Van der Mark and Edward McCourt, the pilgrimages to or within Alberta were usually associated with the pursuit of an improved material standard of living to combat the deprivations of the hungry thirties. One pilgrimage in search of the Promised Land, however, Neil's first trip to the mountains in Music at the Close, is somehow divorced from any dreams of prosperity.

> The trip to the mountains was a haunting and unforgettable experience. When he stopped the car on the heights above the little town of Cochrane and looked across the valley of the Bow at the mighty upheaval of granite that marked the beginning of the Rockies, Neil experienced the kind of emotion that had come to him only twice before-- when he had heard Minnie Whittaker read "Ulysses" aloud, and when he himself had first stumbled upon the jewelled passages of Conrad. It was an emotion that had in it pleasure and awe intermingled, and above all a strange, indefinable pain, a longing for something that had no concrete substance.

> At Banff the feeling was not so marked; rather he felt overwhelmed and oppressed by the mountains. It was a relief and an ecstacy to be out on the plains again and to see the mountains far off, their white peaks flung against a background of pale blue sky (136).

Howard O'Hagan's Tay John (1939) is a novel about these mountains and about the strange yearnings which they evoked in McCourt's Neil Fraser, in McClung's Helmi, in Niven's Angus Munro, in Allen's Amelia Chatsworth, in Dickson's Richard Danby, in Godfrey's Lucy and Philip Brent, and of course in many of O'Hagan's characters. In Tay John, the westward movement into the Alberta Rockies and beyond, is a form of romantic escape from civilization. The escape-to-the-west motif is also associated, in this novel, with the search for prosperity, but as we shall see, this second motif is merely a vain aspiration and a theme of subordinate importance.

When the Alberta tourist travels west to his Rockies for a holiday, it is fair to assume that he wants, if possible, to leave the problems of the material world behind. The mountains provide for him a magical release from his regular, day-to-day reality. And Alberta fiction from Connor and McClung to Robert Kroetsch has always reflected this romantic aspiration associated with the voyage west to the mountains. One can see from countless examples in fiction that the Alberta imagination has linked its romantic aspirations to the journey west.

Howard O'Hagan's novel moves west from Edmonton to the Yellowhead Pass area and beyond to the wilderness

northwest of there. The direction is significant in that, as the hero's quest takes him further to the west, it takes him further from the centres of human civilization. And this brings us to O'Hagan's central theme: the place of heroic virtues on a vanishing frontier. O'Hagan's region, his vanishing frontier, is almost invariably the Jasper-Yellowhead area or the wilderness areas immediately north and east of there. His hierarchy of heroic values is best illustrated by two of his stories, "The Love Story of Alfred Wimple" and "The Tepee." In the first story the lowest end of his hierarchy is mercilessly lampooned. It is a satiric farce about an industrial and amorous rivalry. Alfred Wimple, a wealthy industrialist, hires Jonathan Dingle, a Judas ad man, to help him eliminate his rival in love and business. He does so with a third henchman named Mr. Brockle. In spite of Dingle's treachery in the matter, Alfred Wimple wins his battle, and the hand of his beloved in an advertising campaign "based upon the implications of their [that is, his company's] own destruction"(52).[6] The names are interesting: Alf Wimple, Dingle, Brockle. Borrowing sounds at random from each one of these absurd human labels, one might easily come up with the combination 'Alf Dobble.' And significantly, Alf Dobble, no less absurd than the characters in "Love Story," is the chief antagonist of Tay John. He is the cheap promoter who attempts to turn the mountain wilderness into a fairground.

He is the materialist; for O'Hagan, Alf Dobble and all his kind are the incarnation of human disgust and absurdity. The nobler heights of O'Hagan's hierarchy are illustrated in "The Teepee," which as well has its counterpart in Tay John. "The Teepee" is the story of a lumberjack's affair with a married Indian woman somewhere in the upper Athabasca Valley. The woman, temporarily separated from her husband, lives in a teepee which appeared to have "pushed itself up out of the ground" (107). "It had simply sprouted, as a mushroom would sprout, and seemed as much a part of its surroundings" (107). And as the dwelling seems naturally to emerge from the earth, the woman's Indian husband, having returned to reclaim his wife, seems to return to it.

> Then he let go, turned, ducked out the tent flap and was gone, having showed me the contempt of his strength and the disdain of his charity. From the doorway I watched him go along the ridge and down it, wading through the willows that in the moonlight rose around him, around his legs, his hips, his shoulders until at last, when against the gleaming river his head dropped from view, it was as though he had dropped down among the roots, under the faded grasses, into the earth to which he was closer neighbour than I (112).

Compare this passage to Tay John's final exit. A trapper claims to be the last man to have seen him. "He had the feeling, he said, looking down at the tracks, that Tay John hadn't gone over the pass at all. He had just walked down, the toboggan behind him, under the snow and into the ground."[8]

Tay John was raised among the Shuswaps who lived underground in great pits for protection against the snow. And

because they are closer to the earth, they are nobler according to O'Hagan's scheme of values. Perhaps the earth is the church Tay John and Ardith are seeking (p. 261) when they perish. In the end, Alf Dobble's resort is claimed by the earth: "The cabins disappeared bit by bit, one by one, as though slowly sinking into the ground" (253). Significant, as well, is Tay John's legendary birth. He was said to have been born in his mother's grave and had to be enticed away from the pit to join and lead his Shuswap people.

Four years previous to this novel, Georges Bugnet had also, under the humbling vastness of an Alberta forest, given voice to nature's supremacy and man's insignificance in La Forêt. Between O'Hagan and Bugnet there is a striking similarity in attitudes. One might ascribe this attitude of humility before a natural deity to their conservative Roman Catholic background, but this is highly speculative. It is safer to say that the wilderness of the areas they encountered had a similar impact upon their consciousness. The following passage is O'Hagan's, but it could well have been Bugnet's.

> As I walked up I bent my head against the east wind. I smelt snow in the air. It was cold. In the wind the tall pines bowed, tossing their plumed branches, creaking and groaning in their torment. 'Ah,' said the forest. 'Oh,' said the wind. 'I'll blow,' said the wind, 'till I loosen your roots in the ground, till I blow the needles from your branches and the branches from your stems. After me, winter comes, to lay its snow and silence on the land, on uprooted trees, on the grasses and the moss, on the frozen waters, on the paltry buildings man has built.' Yes, winter was over there beyond the mountains.

> I stood a few moments before Dobble's main building, light from lanterns and candles streaming from its windows, tilted on the hillside, like some ship foundered in a strange and hostile sea. Behind the logs, out of the storm, man moved secure for a while from the elements around him. The murmur of voices reached me. Storms might come, but they would pass away. Winter would come, but it would bring its spring. Men would die, but children would come after them, lifting up white faces to the light. Man's voice, sustained by its own echoes, rolled on in murmurs, in shouts, in laughter, in weeping, in exhortation and prayer, in whispers, hoping somehow to be heard, pausing for an answer-- rising again to drown dismay when no answer came, drifting across the vasts he walked. Man was alone. The future was the blind across his eyes. He held his hands before him, to feel. He listened to the seconds, ticking, measuring his mortality, theirs the only sound in all eternity where suns flamed and stars wheeled and constellations fell apart (231-2).

It is difficult to say which is stronger in O'Hagan, his contempt for mankind or his reverence for the wilderness. Regardless of which feeling is most intense within him, one can see that his hero, Tay John, is an excellent vehicle for both feelings. He is dismayed with the work Dobble and his men were doing to turn his valley into a tourist trap. He had contempt for the Aldersons who rescued him from the river. He was even full of contempt for his own people, the Shuswaps. After rescuing him from the river Alderson sees him "stretched out straight, face buried in the sand, as if he were taking suck from the earth. . . . he was something shaped by the river, by the hills around us to their own ends" (126). To Tay John, even his rescuers are interlopers.

Let us return, now, to O'Hagan's theme, the place of heroic virtues on a vanishing frontier, and examine it in terms of his hierarchy of values. His protagonist (in fact,

hero is as good a term) is Tay John; his antagonist is Alf Dobble. Tay John is a hero who "stalked the boundaries of society without fully entering" (253), a man above men. Jack Denham, the story's principal narrator, tells us that "he was the man on the lonely creek who had out-fought the grizzly bear. After all, we know a man only by what has happened to him. He was for me cast in an heroic mold" (100).

Alf Dobble, defeated and nearly slain by Tay John, represents the usurping forces of modern civilization. As such, Dobble is more a caricature than a fleshed-out fictive being. In the following passage, Dobble performs, and it is not difficult to see O'Hagan's rhetoric at work here. Like so many of the false prophets of the Promised Land in McCourt's novel, Alf Dobble sees himself in the visionary role.

> 'I tell you, Mr. Denham,' he once said, 'we are standing on the threshold of a new era. A new era. Men of vision have made this country of the west. Only men of vision, of vision, mind you, can see that what is already done is but a beginning.'
>
> 'This railway-- what will be its consequences? I will tell you. Where Edmonton is today a city of a few thousands, in ten years, no less, you will have a city of hundreds of thousands' (225-226).

Perhaps Dobble's vision of the future for the Canadian West, ostensibly conceived around 1911, is based on O'Hagan's perceptions of the contemporary scene. O'Hagan was a wrangler and a guide in the Jasper-Hinton area between the wars. Perhaps his dismay over the transformation of his own wilderness playground comes out in Dobble's aggressive ad-man diction.

> 'I am out here because I realize what this is going to mean. There will be a new leisure class in the west. They will look to the mountains as Europe looks to Switzerland. Yes, a Switzerland.'
>
> He came forward and tapped me on the chest-- my chest bore the brunt of his ideas. 'You think I should have commenced on a smaller scale. You have said so. My only worry is, Mr. Denham, whether or not I have begun on a scale sufficiently vast. Vast, that's the word. By next summer I will be able to accommodate two hundred people here. But what is that? Nothing. A beginning, no more. I will put chalets all through these mountains. A fortune in it for the right man. When I consider what lies before me, I cannot sleep. I get up from my bed and pace the floor. I can see those people waiting out there beyond the foothills-- horses, motor-cars, roads, hotels . . . . time, so short... two years or three to prepare. . . you will see, you will regret your decision not to throw in your lot with me' (226).

The tragic truth which Tay John must confront is that, in the modern age, there is no place for heroic virtues. The Alf Dobbles reduce his kingdom to a banality, or try to. The little men oppose him and attempt to kill him. And, as in the case of Sampson or Anthony or Ulysses, women attempt to destroy him. Says Denham, "Women was the death of heroes and the destruction of heroes' work-- but heroes, those vulnerable men, are gone from the earth . . ." (192).

In his own way, McCourt had to confront this same truth in Music. McCourt's heroes, extolled by men like Connor or Eggleston, have died with the last of the homesteaders. And when men attempt to live the heroic ethic in the modern age, they romantically distort the modern realities. I do not mean to imply that courage, tenacity, faith, even physical prowess became superannuated by the end of the settlement era. But the concept of heroism as related to lives of homesteaders,

according the postwar writers, simply lost its relevance with the disappearance of the natural frontier. And the men who could not transpose the old heroism into a socially relevant form of action became the tragic figures of the postwar Alberta novels. For instance, the women in whom they seek salvation dissolve their dreams just as the land does. Men are lured and then destroyed by both, although they are more victims of their own imaginations than of the region or its inhabitants. And this tendency ties in all of the realistic novels of the fifties. Neil Fraser is tormented by the blameless Moira Glenn and defeated by the land. He dies young. Sym Ashley is tormented by the land-hungry Lina and turns his back three times on the land. He dies young. Chris Sondern is tormented by the saintly Beatrice and never reaches his land. He dies young. Tay John is victimized by three women and is destroyed by (and symbolically interred in) the land from which he came.

O'Hagan concludes pessimistically on the death of heroes, and to illustrate it, his novel takes Tay John through all the major fictional modes and their corresponding historical eras. Tay John begins as a hero of myth, progresses with the receipt of his shadow (symbolic of mortality) into a hero of romance, proceeds from there as a tragically mutable hero of high mimetic tragedy, is reduced in the modern age to an anachronistic hero of the low mimetic and ironic modes, and finally returns to his mythical origins by walking mysteriously back into the earth.

Underlying O'Hagan's theme of the transformation of heroic virtues is a broader theme: the vanity of human striving juxtaposed with the omnipotence of the infinite powers of darkness.

> All that is not seen is dark. Light lives only in man's vision. Past our stars, we think, is darkness. But here, we say, is light. Here is light where once was darkness, and beyond it, farther than our eyes can see, than our greatest telescope can pierce, is darkness still.
>
> Men walk upon the earth in light, trailing their shadows that are the day's memories of the night. For each man his shadow is his dark garment, formed to the image of his end, sombre and obscure as his own beginning. It is his shroud awaiting him by his mother's womb lest he forget what, with his first breath of life, he no longer remembers (161-162).

Light is our "brief eternity," darkness the mystery of the abyss before and after the birth of humans or the birth of planets. Throughout the novel, O'Hagan's almost compulsive shadow imagery is a reminder of these musings. The shadow is the body, the clay from which man came and to which he goes. The shadow points to his mutability and to the night which envelopes him at death. This awareness is lyrically explored by Georges Bugnet in his long poem of worship "Hymne à la Nuit."[9] Both men see in darkness a form of refuge from the vanities of existence.

As both men point out in their fiction (Bugnet in La Forêt), the mystery of the darkness is unveiled only at death. Neither mourns this event. Both envision the destruction of human civilization at the hands of the cosmos, or more specifically, at the hands of the natural world. Neither writer

mourns this event either, but simply posits it in mystical or quasi-mystical reflections. What we have here are the requisite attitudes for the Apocalyptic myth without its usual fundamentalist trappings (doom prophesies from the Book of Revelations, the explicit announcement of the Dawning of the Millenium, references to the Day of Judgement for example). In chapter VI I will examine a third writer of Roman Catholic origins who, unlike Bugnet and O'Hagan, is very interested in stylizing this myth in fundamentalist terms. This is Robert Kroetsch. All three of them, writing in three separate subregions arrive at the conclusion that a region of recent frontier origins which combines unusual natural beauty with unusual promises of wealth encourages not simply a 'next-year country' outlook but an apocalyptic sensibility.

In a passage from McCourt's Music at the Close, I quoted an example of the strange yearnings which Neil Fraser felt when confronting the Rockies. It was a mysterious mingling of pleasure and pain which first attracted him then repelled him back to the prairies. In many of O'Hagan's characters as well one sees this approach-withdrawal syndrome working. The following passage,one of Jack Denham's, is an attempt to explain the power these mountains have in attracting men to them.

> Then we cry, we of the West, we Westerners, we who have come here to sit below the mountains-- . . . Give us new earth, we cry; new places, that we may see our shadows shaped in forms that man has never seen before. Let us

> travel on so quickly, let us go so far that our shadows, like ourselves, grow lean with our journeys. Let tomorrow become yesterday, now, this instant, while we speak. Let us go on so quickly that we see the future as the past. Let us look into the new land, beyond the wall that fronts our eyes, over the pass, beyond the source of the river. Let us look into the country beyond the mountains (162-163).

But O'Hagan sees better than any previous Alberta writer that the escape afforded by the journey west to the mountains is merely another illusion. A man cannot outrun his shadow. Just as the prosperity myth has its illusory charms, so has the romantic escape myth, bred, O'Hagan says, by these mountains. "Illusions? Fantasy? Remember that I speak to you in the country of illusion, where a chain of mountains in the distance seems no more than a dog might leap across, or where on a clear winter's day a mountain thirty miles away seems so close that you might stretch out your hand and lean against it. Remember the cold silence that is a hum in your ears, and the river murmur that is a sort of silence" (163).

Howard O'Hagan has tackled the problems of recreating regional history with considerable technical versatility. In his varied approach to styles and fictional modes there is a vital lesson for future Alberta writers who wish to do justice to both the frontier phase and the modern phase of the west's history. Very simply,O'Hagan has attempted to handle each phase on its own terms. The first section of Part I ("Legend") is written in a very simple, almost biblical style in which many details of the Salish and Shuswap legends are included.

This is the mythical phase, so tribal superstitions are given full play.

By Chapter Three of Part I, superstition gives way to natural law. Tay John, after his rivalry for the hand of Schwatt, has begun to take on a recognizably human form, albeit that of an awesomely superior human. But O'Hagan's style still retains the simplicity of an old folk tale: "Smutuksen, whose eyes were fast losing their sight, sat by his fire. He called for Tay John by the old name of Kumkleseem to come to him and touch him in these last days that were his before he died" (69). By the end of Chapter Five, historically speaking, we are through the golden age of Indian supremacy, past the Riel rebellion, and into the twentieth century. From this point on, with several important exceptions, the narrative is realistic. Tay John, having renounced his heroic destiny as leader of the Shuswaps, has taken on a completely human form. Much of this narrative is handled by Jack Denham, who, in the fight with the grizzly bear or in the battle with Dobble's men for instance, sometimes surrounds Tay John with an heroic aura.

In Part II (primarily) there are a number of scenes done in an absurdist vein: Tay John chopping off his hand, Father Rorty's accidental 'suicide,' Alf Dobble and his Aphrodine girdle, and several other episodes. In these scenes men are mere caricatures of men. The ironic mode prevails. The final episode, Tay John's ultimate rejection not only of

humanity but of life itself, is rendered once more in mythical style. It comes to us through Jack Denham via Blackie the trapper who had "the dark brow of a prophet" (259). In this episode Tay John appears to walk back into the earth where, legend had it, he had come from. By shrouding his narrative in the speculations of an eccentric trapper, O'Hagan has allowed the superstitious legend of Tay John to reassert itself.

O'Hagan has gone further than Niven (in The Flying Years) and Bugnet (in Nipsya) in bridging the gap between the frontier days and modern times. In the Indian epidsodes, he has found a narrative style, authenticated by his own research, which permits the Indian consciousness to prevail. In the episodes involving the days of white settlement and expansion, he has adapted his style to the changing consciousness of the new order.

This complex novel is the expression of a neo-primitive sensibility; this is a school of romanticism which views the coming of modern civilization with great desolation. In O'Hagan's case, the new order allows him to amplify his convictions on the vanity of human pursuits. And therefore, the Alberta Rockies are a backdrop for a tale of great desolation and occasional beauty.

From Allen's novel,to Van der Mark's to McCourt's to O'Hagan's, the tone has become increasingly pessimistic;

this, in sharp contrast to the vast majority of early Alberta novels. Unlike any of the post-war writers cited, W. O. Mitchell brings to and recognizes in Alberta a generally optimistic and comic treasure trove. Mitchell is one of the first writers to recognize, as well, that there is something 'different' in Alberta. David Lang echoes this feeling in his first interview with Daddy Sherry.

> 'I built Pile-o-Bones too only they double-crossed me an' named her Regina. . .'
> 'Yes--in Saskatchewan--but I was thinking of Alberta--the foothills. . .'
> 'Who stubbed his toe on that ol' jawbone!'
> 'Me. It was me. Hollered Moose Jaw an' that's what they set her down--city of Moose Jaw. . .'
> 'But you are in Alberta now-- when did you come to the province-- the foothill country. . .'10

David Lang has just flown over the prairies, and his trained eye and prairie memories make further distinctions.

> It was just breaking daylight when he awoke with a crick that ran from his neck and down through one shoulder blade. He looked through the window and out over an exquisitely pure panorama of cloud. Judging by the morning light he guessed that they must be somewhere over the Saskatchewan prairies; eighteen thousand feet below, the Saskatchewan River would be winding its ancient way. Cloud was quite unsatisfying, this celestial neighbourhood too rare and lonely, proper province only for the eagle and the hawk. The prairies must have approached this emptiness when Mr. Sherry was a young man (6-7).

The journey motif takes us westward in this novel. Daddy Sherry comes west from Saskatchewan to Alberta and settles in Paradise Valley, a locale which, for Mitchell, has Edenic overtones. David Lang returns to Alberta where the carefree days of his youth were spent. Mr. Suttee, an American like Alf Dobble, comes to Alberta to capitalize on

the oil reserves in Paradise Valley. This journey-to-Alberta theme has its counterpart in W. O. Mitchell's own life. Since his publication of Who Has Seen the Wind (1947) and his series of Jake and the Kid plays, he has become increasingly interested in Alberta. He has lived in High River, Alberta, intermittently, since the fifties. The Kite could not have been written about Saskatchewan, and Mitchell demonstrates this very clearly.

As a fictional creation, Daddy Sherry was first conceived in a Jake (Saskatchewan) story called "Crocus at the Coronation."[11] A few fragments of that story remain in The Kite. But to write the whole novel around Daddy Sherry, Mitchell had to change some facts surrounding his life. One of these facts was, of course, his place of residence. This was changed from Crocus,Saskatchewan to Shelby, Alberta. West of Shelby is Paradise Valley. Here is a picture of the western edge of this terrain.

> The Spray River has its birth high in the Livingstone Range, Helen had told David, with the marriage of two nameless streams; these gin-clear glacial trickles lived only till August when mountain run-off failed. But in precipitate course under the high sigh of jack-pine, spruce, and fir, the Spray was fed by many creeks, among them Wolf Willow; a slender aquamarine ribbon at first, it twisted tortuously through hundred-foot-high canyon walls of shale and limestone, paused and broadened where beavers had been at work through Paradise Valley, splintering often into a glinting network of water strands. All came together to flow eastward, curving round the foothills flanks and out to the prairie beyond (170).

This is the valley in which Daddy Sherry wishes to be buried and the valley in which he spent his happiest years.

The terrain, Mitchell demonstrates, correlates far better with his optimistic theme than the dry, flat, windswept prairies of Saskatchewan. Here is the opening passage of Who Has Seen the Wind. "Here was the least common denominator of nature, the skeleton requirements simply, of land and sky-- Saskatchewan prairie. It lay wide around the town, stretching to the far line of the sky, shimmering under the June sun and waiting for the unfailing visitation of wind, gentle at first, barely stroking the long grasses and giving them life; later, a long hot gusting that would lift the black topsoil and pile it in barrow pits along the roads, or in deep banks against the fences."[12]

Mitchell's setting here is an excellent region for a story which grapples with the life-death cycle and its meaning to a sensitive young mind. In the quoted passage and elsewhere in the book, the evidence of death in the presence of life and life in the presence of death is obvious.

Through his first novel, Mitchell seems to have arrived at an acceptance of death. In The Kite, the problem for David Lang is how to get the most out of life, death being an inevitability. At the beginning of the novel, Lang is a thirty-nine year old bachelor with an ulcer whose success in the fast-talk world of commercial television and journalism is only financial. His artist's dream of being a writer has all but faded. As his last name indicates, he is pursued by time (his newspaper column is 'Lang Syne'). Time is "The

fellow who erases what I've written. I write and he rubs it out and I write again and he rubs it out again and I'm getting a little tired of it" (150). The problem confronted by the novel, then, if not precisely inquiring how to transcend time through immortality, is how to live unencumbered by time. This involves renouncing the world of deadlines and clocks, as Daddy Sherry shows us, yet living with an awareness of one's own mortality, living vitally in the present, with a soaring spirit. The soaring spirit, like the kite, is held by a thin string which could snap at any moment. It is this wisdom which permits a creative existence; it is this wisdom which permits a man to live wholly (that is sensuously, intuitively, even intellectually) in the present. The Kite is the novel that David Lang dreams of writing and eventually writes. And if it is not exactly his leap into immortality, it is his escape from the clock-watching, deadline-meeting urgencies of the time-bound existence.

The Alberta region which he uses to localize this optimistic quest is the foothills region of the Highwood River valley (his 'Paradise Valley') and the prairies to the east of there. What little conflict there is in the novel is between those who possess Daddy Sherry's time-transcending wisdom and those who do not. It is interesting to note that the antagonists to Daddy Sherry's philosophy are often associated with a threat to the region's rural beauty. They are the materialists, the exploiters. Here is an example of

such a conflict. 'Old Croaker' is an old Methuselah-like Canada goose who, like Daddy Sherry, permits the illusion of immortality.

> In the twenty years that followed that morning by the Post Office steps Harry Richardson had never seen the goose, feeding on stubble, over the barrel of his Greener, or even in flight. But out on the western edge of the Central flyway others had, and over the years he had become an internationally known grey honker. In one season he had flown over and drawn the fire of the president of the Canadian National Railways commuting between pit and private pullman in the Hanna district of Northern Alberta; of the Boston Bruins' right wing and highest scoring player of the NHL for that year, hunting near the Red Deer River in Central Alberta; of the creator of a magnificent and world renowned California cemetery, crouched in a pit precisely the depth, width, and length of those which had made him a multi-millionaire; and in the Shaved Hills district next to the Montana border Old Croaker had been the cause of a coronary ending the career of an overweight Wagnerian tenor on a hunting holiday from the Metropolitan Opera Company (75-76).

Each fall (in reality) the prairies are descended upon by men such as the ones which Mitchell enumerates; they come to shoot these migrant geese. But the exploiters from afar are not the only ones which receive the barbs of Mitchell's satire. The locals get the same treatment, much as they would by regional humorists such as T. C. Haliburton, Mark Twain, or Stephen Leacock (all of whom Mitchell has learned from).

> Town and country had turned out in full force to honour Daddy Sherry; in the ante-room filled with people waiting to go into the main body of the hall, men stood, tight of collar, with weight on one foot and hands in pockets, beside hair-slicked sons with weight on one foot and hands in pockets; mothers vaguely distracted in their best, tried to keep an eye on children playing informal tag through the forest of adult legs; older daughters in

> tartan skirts, nylon, woollen sweaters, now and again touched fingers tenderly to deliberately casual curls from Chez Sadie's or home permanent kits (202).

Nor does the Social Credit government, with its "Minister of Economic Activity and Cultural Affairs," escape Mitchell's barbs. "The gentleman did so for half an hour, using Daddy as a springboard opportunity to mention the great material advance made in the last twenty-five years of Daddy's life, those years being the length of time his party had been in power in the province" (203-204). Nor does the W.A.S.P. majority escape unsatirized, with their "chief Poundmaker Chapter of the IODE" and "Mothers of the Maple Leaf" women's groups. None of these elements of society escape Mitchell's satire because they are all part of the unenlightened, materialistic society which Daddy Sherry opposes.

Perhaps the one episode in the novel in which Mitchell's sensitivity toward his region, his method of reductio ad absurdum, and his temporal theme all come together is the goose-hunt. Here, we see a good example of Mitchell's comic method at work. On his hundredth birthday, Daddy Sherry feels that he must have one last goose hunt or die. Harry Richardson, his physician, decides to oblige him. He brings heated rocks into the goose pit and orders Daddy to sit there in his rocking chair bundled up in an eiderdown. For cover on the pit, dug in among some short, green summer fallow, some green grave-grass is supplied by the undertaker, Ollie Pringle.

Donald Finlay, the minister, is captain of the hunt, and calls the shots. They are seen accompanying Daddy to the grave-like pit as a comically observed trinity of death. The scene has been filtered through Dr. Richardson's mind. "Astonishing ludicrous, that he should be interred here beneath the earth's surface by careful and deliberate appointment. But it would be frightening as well if he were laid out flat on his back. Hell-- this foetal crouch was more ancient-- the most primitive mode of all-- kinked legs-- inclined head-- chin on knees. The start and the end" (87).

Richardson hears the faint sound of geese, and in one of the finest hunting scenes in Canadian literature, the four hunters burst from the pit.

> The barking sound had drifted nearer-- not one dog but as though many of them were coursing in the distance. Not dogs at all! A first flight of geese must have lifted from the water in noisy assault against the sky. Each moment would bring them closer and he must sightlessly wait for them, submit to each tick of time, each second a turning of the screw. With an inner eye he could see the thin and uncertain filament lift above the far horizon, losing and finding itself against cloud and clear sky. Now stretched out the time of terrible waiting, of undulant and elastic advance. Now they could be drifting off course till the sky had quite dissolved them; now they must be individually revealed as their wild calliope thrilled the sky.
>
> Down the wind they came, closing on the field with such falsetto fury it was hard to say whether man stalked goose or goose stalked man. High over the still decoys and the buried mortals they trailed hysteria, circled lower and returned upwind-- shrill hell loosed for recess-- wild-- wild--bagpipe wild. Once more they would leave, Harry Richardson knew, and then drawn by Donald's hoarse plaint on the caller, wooed by the Judas decoys, they would return for the moment of truth. Halfway into the field they hushed except for an occasional conversational GRONK, came

on with a pulsing rush of hoarse wings in the steady rhythm of galley oars.

Donald Finlay's whistle violated the air.

All burst from their pits.

The minister had called it beautifully; the rectangle of men pocketed a flight of almost a hundred birds with feet lowered, momentum drained to the skim of speed that barely kept them aloft. The field was bewildered with wings frantic for leverage on the unbuoyant air. In the flapping, shrieking anarchy Harry saw one goose, lower than all the others, as though the extra weight of his body had brought him down to earth sooner and he must lift the heavier cargo slower than lighter ordinary geese (88-89).

The large goose, of course, is Old Croaker, the legendary Methuselah of geese; and Daddy Sherry is given first opportunity to kill it. But unexpectedly, Daddy refuses.

Old Croaker slipped sideways across the wind, came over the pits of the minister and the undertaker, both staring up to him as they kept their pact to wait for Daddy's fire. The goose was lifting, had gained full flying speed as he passed over the far pits. He veered again and visibly caught the boost of the wind. Ollie's restraint broke then. Without any aim whatsoever, he machine-gunned the three shells from his automatic shot-gun.

Old Croaker flew on.

Donald Finlay emptied his gun.

Old Croaker flew on.

Harry Richardson felt his Greener kick for each barrel.

From the ancient rear end of Old Croaker two bits of down separated themselves and drifted lazily to earth. In beautiful range, at a slow target twice the size of any ordinary goose, the three men had fired seven shots and the honker had not hiccuped in his steady flight. Unable to believe their defeat they stared after the receding line of reprieved geese and the one large speck well behind the others. As they watched, Old Croaker's basso taunt drifted back to them-- deliberate-- quite derisive.

Then Harry heard the honking behind himself. He looked back to a half-resurrected Daddy Sherry. The old man lifted the bright green grave grass over his shoulders like a shawl. He was laughing. Two old ganders laughed in unison.

They laughed at the doctor.

They laughed at the minister.

They laughed at the undertaker.

According to W. O.Mitchell, to laugh at the Minister of Death in this novel involves an espousal of natural beauties and a renunciation of material wealth. In this sentiment, Mitchell is something of a romantic non-materialist; no less romantic than O'Hagan, with his neo-primitive philosophy; no less sentimental than Allen, with his bright array of do-gooders and hymn-singers; no less adamant about the shortcomings of prosperity seekers than Van der Mark or McCourt, with their Lina Ashleys and their Neil Frasers.

To develop his theme, the renunciation of wealth and the espousal of natural beauty, Mitchell resorts to the resources of his region. In this case, that resource is oil. The following regional details, exchanged between Suttee the oilman and Dalgliesh the landman, are used to set up Daddy Sherry's choleric and colourful tirade on the subject.

> 'What I'm about to tell you is in the strictest confidence-- you could use it for your own personal benefit-- I have no objection to that but I must ask you not to mention it to anyone else, We've blown in a dandy with Flat Top Number One.'
>
> 'Gas?'
>
> 'Crude. Tests nine hundred barrels a day-- we've got into what could be the richest pool in the D Two in Alberta. It could well be another Redwater field and Mr. Sherry's offset not much more than two miles away--' (118).

Mr. Suttee is a bit heavy-handed, however, when it comes to making his final pitch to Daddy Sherry. He admits that there may be surface damage from overflow and acidizing. And Daddy Sherry very suddenly fears that Paradise Valley is about to lose its pastoral virginity to American oil interests.

'Oil--oil--blowin' like a whale,' Daddy said a little wildly, 'spoutin' like a fountain!'

'That's right,' said Suttee, 'blowing high in sixty days.'

'All over Ramrod!'

'If it comes in and we hope it does. . .'

'Hundred foot in the air--black stinkin' oil outa all them wells--spreadin' an' stainin' an' killin' that grass--filthy black oil outa filthy black derricks. . .'

'Just a moment, Daddy.' Title Jack tried to soothe him.

'Soakin' down through the top soil! Oh--no you don't! Git outa here an' leave Paradise alone! She's mine--she's mine an' she's Ramrod's. Ramrod's layin' there under the sweet wolf willah an' you ain't gonna vomit your black oil all over him. . .'

'But we can't drill if we don't. . .'

'Damn right you can't!' When he spoke again Daddy's voice was low and plaintive; he did not speak to the men in the room at all.

'She's all right--she's all right. They won't. I ain't stinkin' it up for you--ner for me neither. Move over, Ramrod--you git over now. I'm comin' down beside you soon. Is she blowin'--is she blowin' sweet an' gentle--is she? Aaaaaaaaaaaah-- she's honeycombin' the snow now--chinook--chinook. . .' He lifted his voice in a phlegmy scream that made the insides of Title Jack's elbows go cold. 'Noooooooo! They won't! Head 'em off, Ramrod! Head the sons-of-hunyaks off! She's our valley! She's ours!' (122).

W. O. Mitchell is a comic writer; he is much less a realist than any of his Alberta contemporaries. Only Robert Kroetsch and Ralph Allen approach Mitchell's predisposition for the comic mode. Neither of them, however, allow a humorous view of existence to pervade their treatment of reality. For instance, Ralph Allen has given us Chris Sondern. His sad death and even sadder life are unrelieved by any comic touches. And Kroetsch's <u>But We Are Exiles</u> is almost entirely unrelieved from the grimness of death, guilt and disenchantment.

Early in his writing career Mitchell wrote in the realistic mode, but seemingly with only intermittent conviction. One example is the story "But As Yesterday" in which an old man, a tragic counterpart to Daddy Sherry, awaits death in the presence of a domineering matron and a sympathetic boy.[13] In Who Has Seen the Wind, we get the same grim picture as Brian's grandmother awaits her death. Both the old man of "But As Yesterday" and the grandmother, wait out their vigil by an open window. In The Kite, this scene, the old person waiting for death, recurs. But its grim overtones are dispersed comically when Daddy, in order to win the right to his freedom from the domineering Mrs. Clifford, swings on the trapeze in Bailey's barn (at the age of one hundred and eight).

Mitchell's attitude to the grim realities of life is well articulated in one of the Jake stories, "The Liar Hunter."[14] Mr. Godfrey, an anthropologist, speaks for Mitchell as we can see from almost all of his writings.

> 'This is a hard country, I don't have to tell you that. There are--drought, blizzards, loneliness. A man is a pretty small thing out on all this prairie. He is at the mercy of the elements. He's a lot like--like a--'
>
> 'Fly on a platter,' I said.
>
> 'Was there something else yuh wanted?' said Mr. MacTaggart.
>
> 'That's right,' Mr. Godfrey said. 'These men lie about the things that hurt them most. Their yarns are about the winters and how cold they are the summers and how dry they are. In this country you get the deepest snow, the worst dust storms, the biggest hailstones.'

> 'Mebbe yuh didn't hear me--' Mr. MacTaggert said to Molly--'Was there somethin' more yuh wanted?'
> 'Rust and dust and hail and sawfly and cutworm and drought are terrible things, but not half as frightening if they are made ridiculous. If a man can laugh at them he's won half the battle. When he exaggerates things he isn't lying really: it's a defence, the defence of exaggeration. He can either do that or squeal' (100-101).

Most specifically, this is an example of the hyperbolic imagination at work. But more generally, this scene provides a rationale for much of North American humour. The hyperbole or comic exaggeration, the humour of dialect, the comedy of situation are all part of a greater comic tradition to which Mitchell is aligned. The earliest Canadian of this tradition was Thomas Chandler Haliburton. Perhaps the greatest writer in this tradition was Mark Twain. A more recent writer in this tradition who influenced Mitchell was Stephen Leacock. And since Mitchell's Saskatchewan phase, largely his realistic phase, this tradition of North American humour is what he brings to Alberta. And in turn, Alberta, with its two-edged myth of untouched pastoral wilderness and of prosperity, provided Mitchell with an idyllic setting for his work in this tradition.

All five postwar writers have singled out historically valid reasons for using Alberta as a setting for the journey-to-the-Promised Land motif. Allen, Van der Mark and McCourt cited the Peace River country in the thirties as being the answer to their depression-ridden problems. The direction of their respective pilgrimages is as much north, then, as

west. And O'Hagan, Mitchell, Allen and McCourt have all cited the Alberta Rockies as a setting for spiritual escape from life's difficulties. More specifically, Mitchell has used the Leduc-Redwater oil boom in Alberta; Allen has used the wheat market and prosperity reports of the mid-thirties in Alberta; McCourt has used the price-debt-interest squeeze and Alberta's resultant political eccentricity; Van der Mark has used the northern migration of farmers in and to Alberta in the mid-thirties; O'Hagan has used Indian legend and history plus the history of the C.P.R. in Alberta. All five of these writers have recounted their versions of the prosperity myth with grave reservations. And all but Mitchell have viewed the romantic flight to the mountains as a vain though sometimes beautiful, form of escape. In other words, because of their attempts at penetrating the Alberta Promised Land myth, they have come a long way from its conception in Nellie McClung's Painted Fires.

Among the five novelists of this chapter, only two emerge as being realists: Edward McCourt and Christine Van der Mark. The rest are romantic novelists, and I use the term in a comparative sense; they are romantic relative to the realists of the region. Ralph Allen and W. O. Mitchell are romantic in their comic and sentimental dispersions of potentially tragic actions. In The Kite, for instance, the oil companies lose out in their bid to drill on Alberta soil.

In Peace River Country the do-gooders vanquish the bad guys. Howard O'Hagan is a romantic of the neo-primitive persuasion. He envisions the ultimate defeat of civilization before the powers of nature. And like Bugnet, he forsees a great history for Alberta's Métis populace. He also forsees the destruction of the resorts in Jasper. And history, in fact reality, has not obliged any of these writers. Daddy Sherry might prevent the spread of Alberta oil geysers; reality does not. And Nature might well frown upon civilization's invasion of the wilderness and of the native children of this wilderness; history has not been quite so sympathetic. Only Christine Van der Mark, with her technical mastery of the problems of character as it related to region, and Edward McCourt, with his clear-sighted historical vision, have applied the canons of realism to an Alberta regional novel.

CHAPTER IV

THE POSTWAR YEARS: EARLY SUCCESSES

NOTES

1 The critical reception of these five novels was not unanimously favourable, but divided. Not one critique, however, was wholly unfavourable. On the other hand, the critical reception of all the pre-war novelists except Bugnet and Niven has been decidedly cold. For favourable appraisals of The Kite, see Margaret Laurence, Canadian Literature, 15 (1963), 76-77; Michael Hornyansky, Tamarack Review, 26 (1963), 58-68; for favourable comments on Music at the Close, see George Baldwin, Queen's Quarterly, 68 (1961), 574-587; Claude Bissell, University of Toronto Quarterly, 17 (1948), 265-277; Arnold Edinborough, Queen's Quarterly, 55 (1948), 372-373; for respectful appraisals of Tay John, see A. J. M. Smith, Masks of Fiction (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1961), p. viii; George Robertson, Canadian Literature, 9 (1961), 65-66; for respectful appraisals of Peace River Country, see New York Herald Tribune Book Review (Feb. 9, 1958), 7; Hugo MacPherson, Tamarack Review, 7 (1958), 89-92; Robertson Davies, Saturday Night, 73 (1958), 36-37; and for relatively enthusiastic reactions to In Due Season, see Claude Bissell, University of Toronto Quarterly, 17 (1948), 265-277; Edward A. McCourt, The Canadian West in Fiction (Toronto: Ryerson, 1949), pp. 103-107.

2 Peace River Country (New York: Doubleday, 1958).

3 In Due Season (Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1947).

4 From the introduction to Music at the Close (1947; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), p. 8. All citations will be from this edition.

5 These years were approximately 1873-1885 in reality. I often refer to these as 'frontier' years. I do not use the term as narrowly as F. J. Turner does, but merely to describe rigorous pioneer conditions in general.

[6] Home Is the Stranger (Toronto: Macmillan, 1950).

[7] Both stories are to be found in O'Hagan's collection The Woman Who Got On at Jasper and Other Stories (Denver: Swallow Press, 1963).

[8] Tay John, (1939; rpt. New York: Potter, 1960), p. 264. All citations will be from this edition.

[9] In Voix de la Solitude (Montreal: Editions du totem, 1938).

[10] The Kite (Toronto: Macmillan, 1962), p. 33.

[11] MacLean's Magazine, June 1, 1953.

[12] Who Has Seen the Wind (1947; rpt. Toronto: Macmillan, 1969), p. 3.

[13] Queen's Quarterly, 49, No. 2 (1949), pp. 132-138.

[14] Jake and the Kid (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960).

CHAPTER V

THE SIXTIES: SOME SETBACKS

Five novelists of the immediate post-depression years (1939 - 1960) collectively shaped the framework for a regional myth, all drawing upon parts of Alberta for their setting. They all presented it initially as a Promised Land with a two-sided promise of prosperity and escape (north or west) to the wilderness. These novelists demonstrated that Fortune (as I said in chapter I) had endowed Alberta with enough prosperity to allow it to perpetuate its own hopeful myth. And particularly since the discovery of oil in Alberta (as Mitchell shows us), that myth has become less associated with the unfulfilled aspirations and desperate optimism of Next Year Country and more associated with the guilt-edged assurances of the Promised Land. And guilt-- not tranquility-- seems to accompany the consciousness of a people involved in the invasion of the sanctity of its own wilderness to assure its own prosperity. The two-sided promise, then, of prosperity and wilderness escape, is propelled initially by a romantic dream, and backlashes in a nightmare. This promise-become-curse is typical of regional writing throughout the English speaking world, and I will enlarge upon it in Chapter VI and VII.

The Alberta novelists of the sixties have not come forth with so cohesive a statement. A look at their attitudes toward region and regionalism tells us why this is so. Denis Godfrey distorts the region. Michael Porcsa worships it. George Ryga rejects it. Christine Van der Mark seems to have lost her earlier familiarity with its human contours. Perhaps only Henry Kreisel is capable of bringing the region to life (and Robert Kroetsch, who will be the subject of chapter VI).

One could see in chapter II that the first wave of Alberta writers, those who wrote between 1899 and 1944, had a great deal in common. If they did not formally comprise a school or group of writers, they announced, in sometimes strikingly similar ways, the credo of the regional idyllist. No such response holds together the writers of the sixties.

The earliest of the Alberta writers can be condemned primarily for their unfortunate selection of subject matter and for their limited knowledge of that subject matter. For instance, Connor can be criticized for his innocence, McClung for her moral crusading, Stringer and Paterson for their melodramatic love triangles, Allen and Stead for their dependence upon adventure plots, Dickson for his ignorance of region, Eggleston and Niven for their evasion of the problems of the human heart.

There is, of course, a danger in carrying this type of criticism too far. For instance, I have made the point that most prewar writers were blinded by their own optimism which stemmed largely from romantic preconceptions about life. Is, then, the opposite tendency, that is, the tendency to embrace pessimism, a more laudable approach to regionalism? In my examination of George Ryga's Alberta fiction, I will deal with this question. Another point which I have stressed is that most of the prewar novelists have used the novel as a forum to support the cause of conventional morality. And to exemplify this tendency (rather than cover it entirely) I have pointed to the prudery of these earlier novelists in dealing too chastely (or not at all) with the subject of love. Is, then, the opposite tendency, the writer turning his back on conventional morality, a more plausible approach to realism? In my examination of Michael Porcsa's novel, I will meet this second question. Both questions suggest a break with the wild rose-garden school, a break more evident in writers like Denis Godfrey, Christine Van der Mark and Henry Kreisel. But such a split is at least partly illusory, as we shall see.

The following excerpt is from Hungry Hills (1963) by George Ryga (born 1932). In it, the protagonist, Snit Mandolin, is being forced away from the home of his beloved aunt and taken away to an orphanage by a mountie and a welfare man.

> 'Let's go, Roy,' he said to the welfare man, still holding me. 'I've got the kid, so let's beat it. This broad is driving me buggy.'
>
> With a shove, he pushed me outside the door, and began steering me for the car. I fought like a cat, and almost broke free of the corporal. But Webber closed in and caught me by the other arm. Against the two of them, I could only bite and kick, but I couldn't hold back. When they held me at the car, and Webber reached to open the door, I looked back at our house. Through the open kitchen door I saw my mother sitting at the table, her head buried in her hands. But my aunt was right behind me, her eyes wild as she bashed Corporal Kane this way and that about the face with her hard little fists. She had already given him a pretty mean scratch over his left eye.
>
> 'Uniformed Punk!' she shouted at the Mountie. He was mad by now, and letting go of me with one hand, he hit my aunt with his fist across the mouth. She fell down by the car, both her hands clutching at her lips, and blood oozing out between her fingers.1

A scene with this much pathos in it hearkens back to the protest melodramas which came out of Hollywood in the first third of the century. A good example is Charlie Chaplin's The Kid (1920), also starring Jackie Coogan. It is in his role as folk poet and champion of his region's down-trodden that George Ryga finds such pathos legitimate. For Alberta, George Ryga is something very new and unique.

In the early 1950's he undertook a study of Robert Burns' poetry and balladry. The marks of this encounter with Burns are still very much evident in Ryga's own plays and novels, although Ryga was likely fascinated with the theme of social injustice well before his significant session with Burns' writings. Like Burns, Ryga is interested in ballads and folk music of all kinds. The title of his most recent

novel is Ballad of a Stone-picker. Two of his plays implement folk singing in a contemporary vein: Grass and Wild Strawberries and The Ecstasy of Rita Joe. And like Burns, Ryga considers himself very much a writer of the common man, a writer close to the soil. He was raised in a Northern Alberta Ukrainian settlement east of Peace River and received only seven years of schooling in a one-room school. From those years until now he has educated himself through correspondence school and his own reading. It is doubtful that there is another established writer in all of Canada from more humble beginnings. This background shows up in his writing. Virtually all of his protagonists are social outcasts and underdogs: teenage rebels, defeated drylanders, Indians, European immigrants. And as was so often the case with Robert Burns, Ryga's villains are drawn from the establishment. For Ryga (at least for his Alberta writings), this means the W.A.S.P. majority. In Hungry Hills, Ryga's first published novel, for example, we have a rather obvious division between the forces of good and evil. Snit Mandolin, the protagonist, enumerates these for us. His heroes (or friends) are Matilda Mandolin, Old Man Schnitka, Pete Olson, Joe Skrypka and a group of Ukraininn protest marchers. All have names which suggest European ancestry. His villains are Reverend Crowe, Tom Whittles, Johnny Swift and his father, Miss Bowen, Corporal Kane, Old Man Rogers, Roy Webber, Mr. Hardy and Mrs. McGilvray. All

have Anglo-Saxon names and all represent the established authority of the Alberta scene. Judging from the tone and quantity of racist writing in Alberta, it seems only natural that a writer like Ryga would eventually rise to write in a counter-racist tone. I doubt that he was reacting to Alberta writers as much as against the attitudes in Alberta which prevailed and of which Stringer, Stead, MacInnes and others were only a reflection.

George Ryga has no literary affinities with any of the Alberta writers who were his predecessors. He is related to them by reaction alone. For instance, if one traces the Promised Land theme from Stead to Mitchell, one finds precisely the opposite reaction in Ryga's two Alberta novels. Hungry Hills is the first such novel. It is set in southern Alberta (perhaps near the Cypress Hills), the action taking place primarily around the summer of 1938. The novel has some naturalistic sketches, most of them very bleak, which give it the flavour of some of the American depression fiction of the 1930's. It is a study in ugliness.

> The earth was hot, and soon I felt the soles of my shoes burn with the heat stored in the dusty road. I felt wretched and thirsty. Somehow my arrival home was not what I had expected. I had forgotten the harsh cruelty of the land and its people-- the desperate climate which parched both the soil and the heart of man here. There were no friends here-- there never would be. Life was merely an arrangement which you fashioned for your own convenience.
>
> You could not leave this place. Once you were here, you were here to stay. This you always remembered, in dealings with your neighbours, down to the relationship

> of your own family. Parents fought their children, because these were only additional mouths to feed. Men lusted for their wives, then beat them after the storm subsided, for even the most fleeting pleasures in life are dearly paid for. Here, there was nothing with which to pay, and pleasure, like anger, was a burden. You tolerated your neighbours and your family, but you could never love them. For love was sacrifice, and you sacrificed all when you were born to the hills (18-19).

George Ryga sets out to portray the grotesque human tragedy which results from the "penal servitude to the blasted hills," which were "nice and soft-looking, yet hungry as a wildcat." He capitalizes upon the theme of disenchantment over the myth of the Promised Land. Aunt Matilda recounts the hopeful pilgrimage of the Mandolins from Saskatchewan to Alberta. ". . . we moved to where no one we had known would learn how we made out. Your dad heard about this place, where land was cheap to buy and there was supposed to be enough rain and good soil. So we sold everything we had an' came out to Alberta. We sure got what we asked for, as far as finding folks like ourselves went. Jesus Christ, I wish I could die!" (163).

A competent regional writer, with this theme in mind (the doomed pilgrimage to the Promised Land), should then be able to draw from the physical features and historical ghosts of his region to confirm his thesis of disenchantment. This way he objectifies his own feelings. But Ryga is strangely vague about his region: he refuses to localize it. Could it be that he could not find a suitable region in Alberta to

confirm his bitterness against fate? This is a difficult question to answer.

Less difficult to substantiate, however, is Ryga's carelessness in his approach to his subject matter. His diction and narrative style are sometimes clumsy; his social rhetoric is too often transparent. Here are a few examples of these lapses. The narrator is supposedly illiterate or semi-literate and lapses occasionally into substandard English ("I never seen Johnny so scared and whipped . . ." 122). After all, we are given to understand that he has had only one year of schooling. But often he breaks into lyrical bursts like the following: "Night was coming. Even when the sun settled behind the crest of the westerly hills, its red rays burned in slight wisps of cloud overhead, throwing a disturbing glow over the countryside" (134). Ryga shows little regard for the maintenance of his illusion. His random diction is hardly less disconcerting. Following is an exchange between Elsie the waitress and the narrator.

> Now wot was it ya wan'ed to drink? she asked, her arms akimbo. Coffee, I replied.
> I gotta pot of tea that's still warm, if ya wan' it, she said, and coughed.
> All right, Elsie-- tea'll be fine.
> Youse guys is easy to please, she muttered, and made her way back to the kitchen (147).

Ryga could have learned, from his spiritual grandfather Burns, how better to authenticate his characters' voices. For good renderings of accents emerging from the

Palliser Triangle area, one might, for the sake of comparison, turn to Herbert Harker's Goldenrod (e.g. the widow selling her ranch) or W. O. Mitchell's Who Has Seen the Wind (e.g. the account by the older Ben of the Young Ben's birth).

The regional writer who wishes to undermine the optimistic myth of his region must do so within the terms of the region. If, as Ryga leads us to suspect, Hungry Hills is a Cypress Hills novel, Ryga could have benefitted from some historical exploration. Instead of permitting Snit Mandolin to rage bitterly against the cruelty around him, he might have allowed the region's own voices and the region's own history to speak for itself. In Wolf Willow, for example, Wallace Stegner digs out the story of the Cypress Hills massacre.

In Ryga's second novel, Ballad of a Stone-picker (1966), he commits himself to a specific sub-region of Alberta. It is roughly the area Christine Van der Mark wrote of (In Due Season), somewhere east of Peace River. And the time is roughly the same; it is the depression of the thirties once again. If In Due Season were re-written, but this time from the point of view of Mike Olenski and his alcoholic father, it might sound much like Ryga's Ballad. The time and region would be the same; the tone of puzzled bitterness and defiance would be the same. As it is, however, In Due Season recounts the life of the regional superman (or woman); Ryga's

ballad is the bitter record of the little men, the compulsively driven men, the defeated men, and particularly the grotesques, of his rural community.

Ryga's protagonist and narrator, the stone-picker, is an unnamed farmer who is ostensibly giving an interview to a magazine writer. Through the process of the long interview, the stone-picker finally comes to terms with his tragic destiny. This is his conclusion.

> Then it came to me-- the truth I had never realized before-- the truth Nancy Burla saw when she married the doctor. These arms were all I had and all that anybody had ever wanted. Anybody-- my mother, those who hired stone-pickers, and Nancy Burla. They were the reason for my life. Here was my strength and my food and my bed. There was no other part of me worth anything-- never had been. In so short a time they raised their Jims, their babies, their invalid mothers and fathers-- and then they shrivelled and brought unhappiness to the man willing to work but not able because his visions twisted downwards into a patch of earth no larger than a grave.2

The area where Ryga encounters most of his problems is in his far reaching attempts to justify his pessimistic thesis. To do so, he draws on two earlier works of American fiction: Ring Lardner's "Haircut" (for his narrative style), and William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury (for setting up his story line).

For its time, Lardner's "Haircut" marked an advance in narration of short fiction because it allowed a particular kind of ironic posture in the unravelling of a tale: the limited omniscience of a simple barber at best only vaguely aware of the dramatic implications of his own story. But by

the late twenties, this technique had been refined by men more skilled than Lardner at preserving an authentic story illusion. After all, one asks, has the customer (to whom the barber's tale is told) nothing to say about it? What Lardner hoped to perpetuate through ten or so pages, Ryga attempts to pass off in one hundred and sixty pages. There is not one interruption by the magazine writer in the stone-picker's story.

In William Faulkner's The Sound and the Fury there is a long narrative section by Jason Compson, an embittered brother to Quentin Compson (who committed suicide) and Benjy (an idiot whose outbursts reflect the moral and emotional decay of the Compson family). Ryga's Ballad is narrated by the stone-picker who, though no less embittered than Jason, lacks Jason's blackly comic dimensions. His brother Jim, like Quentin, is sent off by his family to a reputable university where he commits suicide. And instead of just one idiot such as Faulkner's Benjy, Ryga has three of them in Ballad (for emphasis?). Faulkner had a taste for the grotesque, but rarely dwelt upon it. Ryga rarely deserts it. His cast of characters in Ballad are as follows: John the wife-beater who half-killed his wife; Sid Malan who feared his big wife so much he deserted her; Mary and Pete Ruptash who were driven to distraction by the birth of an armless child; Mr. McFarland the homosexual teacher; Dan Jacobs the flea-ridden regional

stud; Tim Callaghan who loved his ox; Sophie Makar the frigid beauty who ran like some nymph through the woods at night; Clem the blacksmith who was destroyed then divorced by a whore; Joe the hunchback who dies of a broken heart because he is forced to renounce the church he built; Marta Walker and her boyfriend Hector, who kill the family watchdog so that they may make love without being disturbed; and Joseph, Freddy and Andrew: Ryga's trinity of dementia, the idiots.

Whereas, at the turn of the century, Ralph Connor, with his joyful troop of muscular Christians, whitewashed his entire region, George Ryga has risen to blackwash it. In Hungry Hills, he painted it hungry and evil; in Ballad, he painted it grotesque. Unlike Faulkner, Ryga does not evince an interest in the exploration of character; he seems luridly curious about the grotesques of the world because, to him, they confirm his pessimism. This is why Ryga cannot render individuals or communities realistically. He can only rage self-pityingly (when he identifies with his protagonists) or bitterly.

> And then I cry. Believe me, man I drop my head down and cry, I cry for every goddamned day I've spent here, rooted to a hundred and sixty acres of mud, rock and bush. I cry for Jim and not hearing his story before he decided there'd never be anyone to hear him. I cry because I've lost her, and with her gone, I've lost life itself. I'm not even as useful as a secondhand tractor you can buy for two hundred dollars. I cost more to keep and I can't do as much work. I thought once I'd write a long poem where I'd tell everything. Or make up a cowboy song to sing. But the words never came (124).

But the words did come, lamentably in the form of several dozen anecdotes strung together but not woven into a plot. The term 'ballad' as Ryga wishes it to be used, is in reality an apology for his approach to novel writing, an approach which simply does not stand up to close scrutiny.

Both Lovat Dickson and Isabel Paterson wrote glowingly about the upper classes of Edmonton and Calgary. Their characters were endowed with heroic qualities or were at least lauded by the narrators as being vivacious or dashing people. And both writers are to be censured because, to complete their view of society, their lower class characters were assigned demonstrably nonheroic qualities (the villainous ones) or caricatured by the narrators as buffoons. To be sure, their fiction does not constitute a response to the profoundest and most significant issues of the time.

In Ballad and Hills George Ryga has produced two proletarian fictions, but just like Dickson and Paterson, he has abused his use of social rhetoric. He has condemned all of his non-proletarians on the basis of their class. Ryga's undisguised social rhetoric and his indulgent bitterness inflates the significance of the class struggle in Alberta social history. In other words, Ryga fails to achieve a realistic portrayal of his subject matter because he distorts his region. In a disconcertingly admiring study, Neil Carson does hit on a point which lays bare Ryga's claims to

realism. "Ryga. . . seems temperamentally caught between the romanticism of hope and the romanticism of despair."[3]

The earliest distorters of the Alberta regional scene brought with them rigid formulae for fiction which prevented them from observing their region on its own terms. Stead's was the adventure plot formula, Stringer's the women's fiction formula, Connor's the biblical redemption formula. Ryga, too, in his Alberta fiction, prevents himself from accurate regional observations because of his adherence to the romanticism-of-despair formula of which Carson speaks. It prevents him from making a sympathetic rendering of the region comprising his native soil and the people farming it. This earthy union to the soil is his Ukrainian-Canadian heritage and he has not taken advantage of this heritage as has Yar Slavutych, for instance, author of Zavojiovnyky Trerii and other collections of Alberta poems. Ryga would have done well to learn from Illia Kiriak (Sons of the Soil, 1959) whose tolerance toward the dominant W.A.S.P. majority is admirable (unfortunately Kiriak began writing too late in life to build any reputation for himself).

George Ryga's novels were published in the Ukraine where they achieved an unusual popularity. But I attribute this success not to Ryga's attempts to recreate life faithfully in Alberta Ukrainian settlements, but rather to the raging social criticism implicit in his books.

In a province the literature of which points to obvious signs of chronic complacency, social criticism is inevitable and relevant. Robert Kroetsch teaches his contemporaries that such criticism may emerge quite naturally from the interplay of authentically drawn regional characters. Social criticism in fiction should not rage or arise out of an author's rejection of his region unless it demonstrates a consciousness of its own rhetorical or satirical intent. Such a rejection, in Ryga's case, amounts to a refusal or an inability to come to terms with his region.

George Ryga's Alberta fiction stands as a reaction to the pervasive complacency of his province's literature. It stands as a militant challenge to the myth of the Promised Land. By contrast, it is interesting to see Michael Porcsa subscribing to that myth. The scene is the Rockies near the Banff townsite (from Under the Brightness of Alien Stars, 1970).

> This weightless feeling of calmness overcame them as they were resting on a clear sunny spot.
> Stillness reigned in the region; no human sound would disturb their absorbing of the magnificent landscape.
> The Blue sash of the far away winding Bow River embraced the strong waist of a giant mountain.
> The small houses of the town could be hardly seen in the distance. The toy-village was hiding among the trees. Only the towers of the castle like hotel stood out distinctly.
> The two boys felt like some engulfed characters in a book dealing with an enchanted land. The neighbouring mountains with their green forests waved their hands to them.
> They acquired the youthful faith of children who believe that behind the farthest mountain, where human eyes cannot reach, is a happy land, the Promised Land of yearning and searching souls (169).4

The two boys are the homosexual protagonists of a novel (set primarily near Banff, Lake Wabamun and Edmonton's west end), which chronicles the difficulties of adjustment and self-acceptance in a straight society. This is the first Alberta novel which focuses specifically on a sexual dilemma. Perhaps for this reason and for the fact that it announces itself as a regional novel, it was studied in a contemporary literature class at a local Edmonton college this past year. But I would question the novel's validity on these grounds. It belongs to the sentimental romance and regional idyll categories. And its context of sexual abnormality does nothing to change Porcsa's approach. The following passage is Peter Koltay's declaration of love for Robert Morieau. But change the sex of one of the two lovers, and the passage is pure McClung.

> I am not afraid of the unknown. I am ready to face it. I must tell Robert all I remember now. I'll tell him that he has always been there. . . He was in my dreams. I feel brave and strong for my dreams materialized in him and the two of us have become one. I am not afraid of being an outcast if Robert belongs there. Life is just another mystery like God, one has to have faith in it. I shall tell him I will follow him everywhere, in happiness and sorrow, in misfortune and joy, in health and illness. I'll take a part of his burdens upon me and share his torments and pleasures with him. We shall live in a land of sunshine, flowers and birdsong. We shall be free to fly and nobody shall cut off our wings. I want to become a person he wishes me to be. . . I want to be like him. . . I am not a child. I don't live in a dream world. I met reality. I grew up (224).

Between Nellie McClung's Alberta fiction and Porcsa's publication, fifty years have lapsed, and yet his regional

observations are just as rosy hued as were Ms. McClung's. A prisoner of her time and her education, Ms. McClung perceived all of nature to be in harmony with her robustly optimistic human world. Here is Porcsa observing nature at the happy conclusion of his novel. "The dawn was already breaking. The eastern sky was a faint-blue; all the heavy storm-clouds of last night had cleared away. The early sun like a glowing red disk rose and flared the spark of the day with a powerful splendour. Two carefree robins sitting on a swaying birch-tree branch began to sing their morning prayer-song as the rising sun kissed them" (220).

Perhaps Porcsa's novel challenges the conventional mores of his region; I am not sure. It is evident that Ryga's fiction presents a challenge to the perpetuation of Alberta's Promised Land myth. But ultimately both writers have failed to pose their counter-statements on life. And their failure is largely a failure of technique. Mark Schorer has demonstrated that technique in the novel is anything that gives form to the raw experience of life. Through technique the novelist discovers his subject matter.[5] Unable to contain the bitter rages of his social protests, Ryga failed to separate himself from his subjects who, as well, rage bitterly. And Porcsa, unable to contain his sentimental excretions, fails to separate himself from his lovers who, as well, gush sentimentally.

The fact that Denis Godfrey, in his novel No Englishman Need Apply (1965), obliterates regional distinctions between

provincial boundaries is no transgression against fiction writing. If he wishes to make Marston "a typical western Canadian town" (7) and Calgary "just another Canadian city, a Marston in the making" (136), and most of Alberta "as flat and featureless as Saskatchewan before it" (137), he does so with a purpose in mind.[6] He wishes to demonstrate that, throughout Canada, there are generalized tendencies, especially in the cities, which are alien and alienating to the British sensibility. Godfrey's model for Marston is in fact Edmonton, but he disguises this. Since this novel, with its pro-British and anti-American contentiousness, is about the clash of essentially British, American and Canadian sensibilities, it is not a regional novel. Godfrey's characters make many national distinctions in their dialogues; they are rarely, if at all, interested in provincial regional distinctions.

However, in spite of Godfrey's lack of interest in regional concerns, it is interesting to read the regional observations he does make, in spite of himself, so to speak. As a record of the cultivated, urban, British sensibility encountering Edmonton for the first time, Godfrey's novel is relevant to regionalism at least peripherally.

Most of the narrator's regional observations are made through the eyes of Philip Brent who reacts, initially, with disdain, defiance, even terror to his surroundings. He can't understand why his wife Lucy should want to live in

Edmonton-Marston: "What's nice about it? A huge, sprawling, commercial dump frozen stiff for six months a year! You realize, don't you, that we won't see a blade of green grass till next May?" (59). The oldest houses are only sixty years or so. There is no sense of the past. The city is "crammed to overflowing with the best and biggest that money could buy. Purposeful throngs crowded the sidewalks; with rarely a gap in the metred parking-spaces were already filled. The buildings, cube on cube massively towering, barricaded with a substitute immensity the pallid autumn sky"(7).

Godfrey's novel, obviously subtler than those of Ryga or Porcsa, is arranged into a scheme of rhetoric and counter-rhetoric which attempts both to engage and discard Philip Brent's alarmist views of his region and his non-British colleagues. His inscription is a stanza from Goethe: "And if thou hast it not,/This dying and becoming,/Thou art but an uneasy guest/Upon the dark earth" (1). He divides his novel into "The Dying" (pt. I, pp. 1-234) and "The Becoming" (pt. II, pp. 235-272). As seen by the obvious disparity in length between Parts I and II, this novel is Godfrey's Saison en Enfer, far more concerned with the death of the soul than its eventual rebirth. Where is Hell for an Englishman? Within the terms of Godfrey's novel, it is Edmonton-Marston in winter. And Godfrey, with a romantic poet's eye for nature's varying moods, makes a strong case for his selection

of this region to correspond to Brent's existential Hell. In late fall "day and night, in anything from thirty to fifty degrees of frost, the car must stay in the open, parked at the curb. Daily, as the winter cold intensified, starting it up became more difficult; twice the nearest service station had to tow it off to be thawed. Then, abruptly, Philip lost interest, refused to be bothered; the car, shrouded in snow, its battery dead, its windows opaque with frost, could stay where it was and be damned to it, until the spring" (61).

In mid-winter

> The temperature hovered at the twenty below mark, accompanied not infrequently by a bone-chilling wind. Snow fell out of the leaden skies almost continuously; each morning from beyond windows opaque with frost came the scrape of snow shovels, clearing interminably the obliterated walks. February, though, still icy and barely suggestive yet of lengthening daylight, brought, it was true, a cloudless day or so of dazzling sun, a first premonition, if you cared to think that way, of spring. But the eye, exhausted with whiteness, could not respond, could envisage nothing for a long time yet but this eternity of snow (102).

In late winter

> The arctic cold of early March, dropping one grey morning to an unimaginable thirty-eight below, was to prove unexpectedly final. Winter remained, of course, and once or twice blizzards of snow intensified all over again the by now scarcely endurable whiteness. Something, however, some cosmic stirring, was afoot; the sky, tumultuous with massive clouds, and clearly seen at last through frost-free windows, seemed urgent with premonition. Winter's iron grip, though capable of many a short-lived contraction, had undeniably eased. Lucy, bone weary of it all, and reading in letters from England of daffodils and tulips, of trees already in blossom and early leaf, admitted even to herself the inroads of nostalgia. It would be May, or so they told her, before the first tulip flowered (117).

Godfrey, in the "Dying" sequence, naturally subordinates all regional details to his death motif. No author before him has seen fit to portray the Alberta nightmare almost totally within the confines of winter. And this would seem very strange indeed were it not for the fact that proportionately few Alberta writers have even permitted the emotion of despair to sully their landscape. There is a false rebirth of hope in the novel as Philip undergoes a temporary change of heart and as his wife and son head for the Rockies to meet him for their holidays. And geared to this rebirth of hope is an idyllic sequence of serenity in the mountains of Banff and Yoho Park. Lucy discovers, beyond the prairie "with theatrical suddenness, were the mountains, looming, majestic, soaring into snow; a barrier, surmounted skyward by yet another, equally impressive, of tumultuous cloud. These, beyond anything she had been able to imagine were the Rockies; this, that first glimpse of them, never after to be forgotten!" (141). Their trip is marred slightly by one incident, the sight of dozens of gophers slaughtered on the highway: "a trail of smashed and gory corpses. . . there to be pecked at-- a final macabre detail-- by clusters of predatory crows" (174). One gopher is injured by the car ahead and they see it "leaping and floundering in agony about the road" (174).

And when the last barrier to Philip's attempted suicide is mercilessly removed, it is this gory detail which pricks his consciousness. "In the corridor, blundering, at one point colliding with the wall, he continued his flight--headlong, instinctive, for Lucy. On the long, down-curving marble stairs, an image leapt in his mind, an image of nightmare. It was that animal again, that gopher, leaping, floundering, in the agony of death. . . . The stairs negotiated, he broke into a run" (177).

Insofar as Godfrey supplies natural correlatives to his human dilemma which arise out of the seasonal peculiarities and seasonal moods of the land, No Englishman is regional fiction. But the people encountered by the Brents are not native to the Alberta region, nor are they native to any region but that of their nation. Because his novel is an account of the clash of nationalities in a new land, Godfrey works with national or international stereotypes. There are attempts to particularize the Weinbergs using their Jewish Austro-Czech background to fill them in, but there is a much stronger tendency to label them as typical Europeans ("As usual the European touch was much in evidence and would continue throughout the evening," 87). When the Brents encounter Debbie Kristensen and Steve Horton, the contrasts aimed at in the encounter are British-Canadian contrasts, not contrasts particularized through region. This comes out in the

dialogues in all parts of the novel. Of Debbie, Steve says, "Now don't get me wrong on this. I'm not complaining. Debbie's a swell kid. It's just. . . just that she's too serious, too darn tense. Gee, English girls weren't like that, not the ones I dated" (27). Broddick and his wife, like the Brents, are quintessentially British. Professor Broddick is an "unhurried figure in a raglan coat, tweed suit and cap, after twenty-four years in Canada still unmistakably English" (4). Brent himself is "the standard English academic product, fully qualified and guaranteed" (9). Appraising Lucy Brent, Broddick notes that "in her at least the usual English charm was genuine, the usual ease of manner disarmingly unforced" (11). Professor Floyd is a Canadian by birth but "very American" in his outlook: "He came to us from Oregon. Of course, that was all right. We'd appointed Americans or American-trained men before Floyd, and there'd been no trouble. It was just that Floyd was so very American" (51).

I have once said that the avoidance of regional specifying is not necessarily an offense against the novel. And it is Godfrey's (legitimate) prerogative to distort or annihilate regional distinctions. But his novel suffers badly from his abusive nationalistic tirades, like the following, which proceed totally unrelieved in Part I of the novel. As usual, the tirade comes from Brent the protagonist, and it is Americans he is castigating.

> 'It seemed a lot of blah at the time. But you know. . . after what I've just seen and heard down in the States I've really begun to wonder. Those people down there. . . they don't really care for literature as such, don't really respect it. It's something. . .' a pause, a weighing of the words, 'something in the reality of which they don't really believe. All they want is to dissect it, see how many facts they can break it down into for their own clever little purposes. Of course in England, it's much the same, factfinding and cleverness, but in England there's still tradition, a kind of inherited realization that literature is important, alive-- not a carcase of dead meat to be fed through a mincer' (165).

Following his scheme in the second part of the novel, Godfrey fortunately mitigates the force of his nationalistic assaults. Weakly, a penitent and rejuvenated Philip Brent admits to Lucy, "west or east, Marston or the Maritimes, its all the same. You don't solve an issue by shifting it somewhere else" (261). Brent has finally seen that much of his trouble is of his own making, but neither he nor Godfrey will attempt to retract any of the novel's nationalistic abuse. These opinions go unchallenged and our sympathy for Brent is correspondingly strained. In the same scene, Brent grumbles about Marston University's administrators' "Getting an Englishman over here and then doing him down just because he's an Englishman-- no, I'm not defending that" (258).

F. W. Watt has noted that Godfrey's British couple, although well drawn, "moves clumsily against its social setting."[7] This observation is astute, I believe, for two reasons. First of all, Godfrey has not gone to great lengths to render his region sympathetically. His narrative is a

British voice which intrudes upon the action. Value judgements are forced upon the reader. Lucy Brent dislikes Steve Horton's North American styled haircut and says so. Then the narrator adds, "and in fact it was unbecoming, coarsening. One of his best features had been that long, unruly hair" (123). The narrator later calls it "ugly" (150). And our villainous Professor Floyd is described in his actions as "insidious" and "stupid" by the narrator (75). A sympathetic rendering of region can only be accomplished by a narrative style which allows the region to speak for itself. The second reason for my concurrence with F. W. Watt's review goes back to Godfrey's manipulation of national stereotypes. His British characters, according to Watt, are well drawn partly because one may speak with some certitude of a British image. At least one may speak of it with less need of particularizing than one would speak of the American image or (especially) the Canadian image (whatever that is). If one can in fact speak of an American image it has only been grappled with for a century and a half. And the Canadian image is of course still in a state of definition.

There is a lesson, then, to be learned from Godfrey's Edmonton novel. To round out his characters better and to lend them more fluidity, Godfrey might well have fallen back upon regional details. Not only would this have reduced the damaging nationalistic tension in his novel, it would have

allowed the novel's issues to reside with people, not labels. The regionalist localizes his characters, that is, he particularizes them to avoid allowing his people to become mere abstractions. For example, Arthur Floyd is a rather lifeless abstraction because he is a set of fixed attitudes. It is possible, then, to see as a basis for this novel's rhetorical imbalance, Godfrey's insistence upon being national rather than regional in his contentions.

In her first novel, In Due Season, Christine Van der Mark revealed at least a passing interest in the social life of the community of Bear Claw. But because it was such a new community she was not disposed to concentrate upon such things as gestures and bearing appropriate to classes of people, masks or social personnae projected by various members of the community, dialogues pregnant with implication pointing to much larger human designs within the social structure. Here, of course, I am speaking of manners, what Lionel Trilling refers to as "a culture's hum and buzz of implication."[8] The western Canadian novelist who wishes to pursue an interest in manners must turn to a community which has been settled at least long enough to have social traditions and an established social life. The Ulna of Christine Van der Mark's Honey in the Rock (1966) is such a community. Like the community from which the Ashleys made their romantic escape northward, it is in southeastern Alberta, set in the depression.

I say 'romantic' escape, because in the absence of a tangible social world, Ms. Van der Mark takes us closer to the realm of romance than novelistic fiction, the latter being more concerned with the subject of manners. The most obvious element of romance in In Due Season is Poppy's adventurous escape north with Jay Baptiste. There is no element of the fabulous in Honey in the Rock. It is the closest approximation we have in Alberta fiction to a comedy of manners.

For the sake of argument, let us imagine that Jane Austen's soul had been reincarnated into that of an Alberta country woman; and eventually the same impulse which resulted in Pride and Prejudice was released again, this time in terms of an Alberta comedy of manners. Perhaps, then, the story would unfold not unlike Honey in the Rock. Or at least one reads Honey with the suspicion that the author would not be displeased if this analogy were granted her. But of course the analogy does not hold up to any great extent.

Both novels are concerned with the courtship and marriage of five country dwelling sisters. While Ms. Austen devotes most of her attention to the intrigues surrounding the two oldest sisters, Elizabeth and Jane Bennet (and Lydia to some extent), Ms. Van der Mark attempts to treat each sister's courtship with equal attention. Both plots are impelled by the same feminine compulsion to make or get a good match. Ms. Austen continuously displays first the social gestures of her characters, then supplies the powerful implications behind

those gestures. Charlotte Lucas, homely, unromantic, and desperate, meets Mr. Collins, a cold, tedious and equally unromantic minister who is attempting to "secure an amiable companion" in the vivacious Elizabeth. In her first encounter with Mr. Collins, Elizabeth "owed her greatest relief to her friend Miss Lucas, who often joined them, and good-naturedly engaged Mr. Collins' conversation to herself."[9] With the help of Charlotte Lucas, then, Elizabeth is able to turn down Collins' offer. Charlotte is, in return, "detained. . . by the civility of Mr. Collins, whose inquiries after herself and all her family were very minute" (114). Then, in return, she returns his 'civility:' ". . . the assiduous attentions which he had been so sensible of himself were transferred for the rest of the day to Miss Lucas, whose civility in listening to him was a seasonable relief to them all" (115). When Collins announces his engagement to Miss Lucas, these gestures of 'civility' suddenly are unmasked and Charlotte's desperate designs are laid bare.

The 'civilities' of Ulna's match-makers and aspiring lovers, of course, take on a different outward form, but they are present all the same. And, as was the case in Ms. Austen's novel, regional manners provide both the disguise and the key to the compulsions which govern them. Ada Fox is ambitious to re-kindle a match with her old boyfriend, Reuben Zwick, who has since developed a strong attachment to Leota

Leniuk. He is a very unwilling victim when she inveigles him over to her empty house with the following note: "Dear Reuben. . . A telegram came for you just when I was going off duty. I am taking it home, and the rest of your mail too, and leaving this note. For two reasons. One is that you would have to wait an awful long time in the line-up to get it. And the other is, if it's bad news, I'll be there to hold your hand. As ever, Ada Pearl."[10] There is intimacy and affection in her note, but no hint of the fever which motivated it. Disguised, as well, is her conversation with Reuben when he comes ("have a coffee with me, just for old times' sake" or "Just milk, no sugar for you. I remember, you see" or "Remember the Shakespeare Miss Hester used to sling at us? Here have some cake").

But her pretences, under his cold scrutiny, break down, and still he rejects her. The compulsion behind the mask leaps out after Reuben's final rejection of Ada's entreaties: "You bastard!" she tells him, and he exits.

I have said that this novel is the closest approach in Alberta fiction to a novel (or comedy) of manners. But it comes nowhere near to distinguishing an Alberta sub-region in terms of some unique revelations of local manners. The social arena (the dance-hall, school, and church-oriented social life) is authentically described, but Ms. Van der Mark's approach to regional manners is enveloped in cliché.

All regional writers work in local clichés, but these clichés needn't comprise a verbal envelope, a barrier to prevent wide ranging implications from emerging. Ms. Van der Mark's clichés are, typically, the public gestures, symbols and institutions to which her Ulna people adhere: square dance calls, box socials, church hymns, local country music, school dances, cloak-room gossip, puritanical moral codes and church sermons. Unfortunately, her characters as well are clichés from sentimental fiction. Here is Dan Root, for instance: "Except for the intelligent eyes with their depth and pathos and tenderness, his youthful face with its snub features and wide unsmiling mouth, had a slightly cynical cast in which bitterness had too soon overlaid a nature basically sweet" (6); or Fenna, the love-torn victim of suicide: ". . . a pretty young girl. . . looking shyly up to Dan, her bright hair shining, her skin glowing rose pink" (19); later "remembering the warmth of Dan's embrace, the touch of his hands and his lips, she wept bitterly, the hot tears burning her freezing face" (133); or her two prettiest sisters: "But while Sarah's coloring glowed richly on cheek and lip and her dimples were deep and her figure ripe, Leota was pale, slender, and withdrawn. Yet her face had strong beautiful lines. In her left cheek there lurked the trace of a dimple which showed but rarely" (24).

Dan Root's poem, quite properly (to be consistent with his unsophisticated, youthful spirit), is cliché-ridden:

"Tonight/ I make a prayer!/ Dear God, grant me to taste of the Honey in the Rock!" (64). His religious country and western song is a cliché as well, again consistent with his character. "He is like the fenceline sure/ Hand outstretched for to save" (73). But neither the poem nor the song take us beyond their cliché-ridden surface texture. Instead, the poem and the song return us to thematic clichés (the easy affirmations within the song and the poem) or to unresolved confusions; it is impossible to tell which. Gottlieb (translated, love of God) is actually saved by a fenceline during a dust storm. Are we to think, then, that there is religious prophecy in Dan Root's song? If he is, in fact, "like a fenceline sure, hand outstretched for to save," He is somewhat random in His choice of rescue victims. Gottlieb, though capable at times of feelings of love, is responsible for breaking at least one girl's heart in the story. He is the rake prototype and marries another younger girl after getting her pregnant. But Fenna, an innocent victim of her own confusion and guilt, is sacrificed and dies meaninglessly. Ms. Van der Mark insists on the connection between the prophecy in Dan Root's song and Gottlieb's miraculous escape from death, yet befuddles her own scheme with Fenna's death. Had she resolved Fenna's death into some sort of ironic awareness of the random justice of the universe, for instance, she might have avoided this confusion.

I have commented upon clichés comprising verbal envelopes within which thematic clichés are evinced in the form of easy affirmations about life and God. This gratuitous form of affirmation culminates in the author's reliance upon naming her characters' emotions rather than showing them as she did so skillfully in her first novel. Here, for instance, is the novel's concluding scene in which Dan Root hears his own song being sung in the Ulna bar.

> Too brimful of emotion to speak, Dan waved a hand at the room in general, and then swung up his glass of tomato juice for a long cooling drink. He knew he would remember this moment as long as he lived. The tawdry beer parlour. These rough men, drunken and noisy, ready to fight at the drop of a cowboy hat. Lonely men. Singing his song. Paying tribute to the city slicker in whom they had found neither sham nor cowardice. It was one of those rewards, rich and rare, that Dan was to find at intervals throughout his life.
>
> It was indeed the very honey in the rock (224).

Enough has been said in chapter II about the difficulties of describing joy in a modern novel, except to add that it can be done. Ms. Van der Mark accomplished it with her first novel <u>In Due Season</u> in chapter XI. It is the first day of spring in the community of Bear Claw and each of the five scenes of the chapter are united in spirit by a flock of geese passing over. The people in the scattered parts of the community react to the passing geese with a sense of release, but not once is it necessary for the narrator to remind us that these people are happy. Jack Two Knives goes outside to smoke his pipe, "luxuriating in each puff" (131). Pete

Panachuk's team of horses refuses to stand still. Sven Jensen proposes to Miss Hughes. The school children cannot concentrate on their work when they hear the geese. Sym Ashley comes home from his long absence. And true to character, Lina starts to plan her spring seeding. In this ten page chapter, action and image work together without any sense of straining to show us what the later novel has to tell us. Children grow restless, old men smoke, lovers plan or make up and "outside, the warm wind tossed about through the forest, while the land beneath the snow seemed to be gathering a mighty strength to free itself. And in the night, the gurgling and dripping sound of running water began" (139). Honey is Christine Van der Mark's affirmation of life, a turning away from the disenchantment of In Due Season's conclusion. But to affirm life she has had to relax her grasp on realism and turn to the sentimentality which subscribes to the ever popular myth of Alberta as a Promised Land.

Denis Godfrey's failures were technical in that, as seen in the intrusions of his British-tailored narrative voice, he failed to separate his own attitudes from those in his subject matter enough to withdraw from a harshly didactic nationalism. Ms. Van der Mark's failures were technical because she was unable to transcend the sentimental barrier of clichés with which she worked. The failures of both these writers are, in a minor way, similar to the obvious technical

failures of Ryga and Porcsa. And of the four of them, only Godfrey is enough withdrawn from sentimentality to call himself a realist. But as we have seen, his novel is not a regional novel. Godfrey correlates the Englishman's nightmare with the wintry harshness and brutality of Alberta's natural world, but his human landscape is peopled by personages alien to this region or (perhaps) any other.

Henry Kreisel, like Godfrey, a professor in the University of Alberta's English department, works well in Alberta winter scenes like those of his British colleague. He published The Betrayal in 1964. One of his lifelong fascinations has been the role of environment in the shaping of experience, and most frequently, the role of the natural landscape in shaping consciousness. His much anthologized story "The Broken Globe" illustrates this fascination with "the state of mind produced by the sheer physical fact of the prairie."[11]

The vastness of the Alberta prairie (somewhat near Camrose) permits Mr. Solchuk, a believer since boyhood in the Ptolemaic universe, to insist that the world is flat and stationary. He argues this theory passionately to the narrator.

> His fury was not all spent. We sat for a while in silence, and then I rose. Together we walked out of the house. When I was about to get into my car, he touched me lightly on the arm. I turned. His eyes surveyed the vast expanse of sky and land, stretching far into the distance, reddish clouds in the sky and blue shadows on the land. With a gesture of great dignity and power he lifted his arm and stood pointing into the distance, at the flat land and the low-hanging sky.

> "Look," he said, very slowly and very quietly, "she is flat and she stands still". 12

In his approach to prairie consciousness, Kreisel is quite Turnerian. "The prairie settlements," he writes, "insecure islands in that vast land-sea have been austere, intensely puritan societies." He adds that "prairie puritanism is one result of the conquest of the land, part of the price exacted for the conquest. Like the theme of the conquest of the land, the theme of the imprisoned spirit dominates serious prairie writing, and is connected with it".[13] One such imprisoned spirit, who seeks release through art, is Herman O. Mahler. It is his unenviable task in "The Travelling Nude" to act as art instructor to the small communities all over Alberta. Unhappily, he meets spirits more imprisoned than his own.

> Most of my students were unfortunately wholly intent upon reproducing mountains and lakes and flowers with a passion that depressed me. "More imagination!" I cried. "Use all the imagination you have!" Whereupon dear Mrs. McGregor, when next I arrived in her neck of the woods, showed proudly a canvas on which she had painted a desert sheik, in long white robes and red fez, sitting in a posture meant to be majestic on an improbable-looking Arabian horse, and staring at what was unquestionably a frozen lake in front of him, and the snow-capped Rocky Mountains ringing him all round. The critical mind stood awed and aghast. All I could mutter was, "You could improve the folds in the sheik's robe". 14

And so we have what initially appears to be a cultural wasteland. But this is not the only thing Kreisel sees in the human He sees a people able to cope with "a vast and frequently hostile natural environment."[15] He openly

admires them for their toughness, courage and simply their practical ability to survive. Such a person is Mrs. Miller from Kreisel's "Two Sisters in Geneva." She came from England with her Alberta husband and homesteaded for thirty-three years in the Peace River country. Her sister, Emily Buonarroti, went east with her Italian artist husband to Florence. The two women are a study in the naturalistic impact of environment shaping experience. Mrs. Miller, compared to her sister, has an uncanny sense of self-preservation. Her expression "I thank God Mr. Miller left me provided for" echoes through the story like a jingle. She is capable and aggressive, though intellectually narrow and bigoted. Of Florence she says "I'll be glad when I can get back to a place where you can understand what people are saying, though. It's a weird feeling hearing people jabbering away and you not understanding a word they're saying."[16] Her sister is tolerant and aesthetic, a gentle, sensitive, but frail woman. Her health is extremely bad. With a balanced sense of irony, Kreisel has dispersed his value judgements into this story's conceptual tug-of-war. He admires Mrs. Miller's pragmatism, but not her intellect; he admires Mrs. Buonarroti's sensitivity, but does not see her as capable of survival. One feels ambiguous towards both women because Kreisel has conceived them ironically.

The same ambiguities evinced by the sisters are general in Kreisel's sketches of Edmonton in The Betrayal. In the

first half of the following passage, note the pragmatically constructed low-priced stores which give Stappler "a feeling of abundant life." Then note the position of the public library. This is a well observed sketch.

> He walked away from the station, down a long street, past some shack-like wooden buildings that housed stores selling men's clothing and dry goods and furniture.
>
> He stopped momentarily outside a pawnshop, he said, looking apprehensively into the window, at the worn watches and the old-fashioned gilded clocks, at dusty cameras and rusty rifles. The pawnshop reassured him. It humanized the place for him. He had made use of pawnshops before, he said, in several countries and in various cities.
>
> Some of the stores had their wares, or at least part of them, displayed outside, in a manner which was familiar to him from some European cities in which he had been. He saw rubber boots dangling down, swaying like mobiles, he said, and men's suits and overcoats suspended from hangers. That also pleased him. Especially, he said, the display-windows chock full of articles, shirts piled upon shirts, and shoes upon shoes. These displays, he said, gave him a feeling of abundant life. Because here were all these things, shouting out to the multitude that here was God's plenty, and that God's plenty was cheap.
>
> He liked these stores better in a way than the more respectable department stores he passed later on. These, he said, were just dull. In one of them he bought some overshoes, some ear-muffs, and some warm woollen gloves, and so equipped ventured on. He stopped to have some lunch. Afterwards, exploring further, he noticed a boardwalk leading off the main avenue into what seemed at first a rather dingy alley. A little crude wooden sign was nailed up there, showing a pointed finger and reading PUBLIC LIBRARY. This sign he followed until, at the end of the alley there was suddenly a little square with the library on the left and something like a promenade walk beyond the square, and as he walked towards it, a marvellous vista of the winding, white, and frozen river suddenly opened up before him, and he looked across at the wooded valley and little houses stretching away on the other side. For some time he stood looking at the river and at the vast clear sky, and then at last the cold drove him into the library. It was a charming little place, he said, and he felt as if he had come to an oasis (57-58).17

This same city, Edmonton in 1952, so stodgy and puritanical, is later described by Stappler in glowing terms: "It's magnificent to fly into this city at night. Suddenly, you know, out of an immense darkness there comes a great circle of light. God, how marvellous! But frightening, too. Because the darkness is so vast and the circle of light so small-- by comparison. I've made a reservation at the MacDonald" (211). Even Stappler's short, glowing account includes a brief banality at the end. This is Kreisel's ironic touch.

His character sketches reveal further ambiguities, that is, carefully qualified opinions of his subjects. Mark Lerner is a learner, but at the same time naive. Joseph Held (Held-hero) is heroic to his daughter, but at the same time a coward. Stappler is an arrogant adventurous man of the world, but to himself, a craven coward as well.

Stappler's own culpability in the death, first of his mother, then of Held, leads him eventually into a role of atonement. He becomes a doctor for Indians in the North like his regional ancestor Angus Munro (F. J. Niven's Flying Years) who became an Indian agent. Both Kreisel and Niven have adopted something of a Conradian solution for their guilt ridden protagonists. Like Lord Jim, for instance, these characters turn their back on the main stream of white civilization. Alberta seems to have been a convenient region

for this Conradian manifestation of the exile motif.

In accounting for Kreisel's regional attitudes it is interesting to compare some of his Viennese characters with his Albertans, minor characters in both cases. For instance, Stappler's father was a fine example of European man: a man of great intellect, charm and sophistication. Yet he commits suicide. When one thinks of the old world nightmares and vanities, one thinks first of Dr. Stappler. Then there are Art and Mary, the newlyweds who spend their honeymoon in the Victoria Hotel, an Edmonton slum hotel. They are pathetically ignorant, given to emotional outbursts of jealousy, but in their passion for each other they blindly affirm life. Says Stappler, "I feel happy for them . . . and I thought if only I could so easily chase my ghosts away. . . Life. . . has no time for nightmares in its endless quest to reproduce itself" (64). The city of Edmonton itself resonates with this same assessment. Edmonton is a "growing, unselfconscious western city," "Peaceful, stodgy" with "all its activity, its growth, its feeling that the world has only just begun and history is a tomb, a collection of dry bones" (2).

Lerner has a streak of this innocence attributed to Art and Mary and to the city. He is always referring to his comfortable apartment and to his secure life. To Stappler, he is a typical Canadian.

> '. . . your damned Olympian view of all sides of all questions. You Canadians have it easy, so cosy, so rich, so beautifully settled in soft chairs to watch the world's drama. . . . Oh, I know,' he said quickly, holding up his hand to prevent me from breaking in, 'you are heroic fighters and-- what do they say in the papers?-- staunch and loyal allies, but you haven't had to go down into hell altogether. Individual hells no doubt you have, but that-- that immense hell where Held and I met, there you haven't been. Fortunate people.'
>
> 'What do you want me to do?' I asked: 'Go to hell?'
>
> 'There you go,' he said, 'turning it all into a joke. I wanted to go on and say that perhaps it is necessary that some people should be there who are the witnesses, the listeners and the observers only, to keep some sanity in the world. That is what I thank you for.'
>
> 'You mean us in general or me personally?'
>
> 'Both, I suppose. But you personally now. You made me see what I have to do. Last night' (150-151).

Edmonton, then, is a carefully particularized microcosm, not just of Canada, but of all communities which lie at the edge of the wilderness like great circles of light rung around by darkness. And if, in these cloistered outposts, sanity is to be perpetuated as Stappler hopes, the Mark Lerners of the world have a distinctive role to play. We are made abundantly aware of Edmonton's complacent spirit, the nightmares of civilization's struggles "covered by merciful and forgetful snow" (141). So there must be learned, objective men to record the past and bring forth for future generations the myths of conscience. In this role, Lerner is at times associated with the Mark of the New Testament who records such events as the last supper (see pp. 155-156).

In this novel, Kreisel utilizes the popular mythology which has in the past endowed Alberta with the qualities of

the Promised Land. For him, they are useful banalities: "Still, there's forchoons have been made there. In oil. Mind you, there's many has gambled and lost. But there's forchoons have been made there" (54); "I heard a voice on the radio saying 'Edmonton, the Gateway to the North'" (55); "I have watched with interest and satisfaction the growth of this city" (204); or the ironically meaningful question throughout the book, "And what brought you to Edmonton?" By doing this he aligns himself (less with his contemporaries in the sixties) with regionalists like McCourt (Music at the Close), Bugnet (La Forêt), Van der Mark (In Due Season) and O'Hagan (Tay John), all of whom have played down the illusions of the Promised Land while at the same time acknowledging their existence.

Kreisel towers above his Alberta contemporaries of the sixties in spite of his relatively brief output. Unlike Ryga, he has taken advantage of his ethnic European background to create meaningful juxtapositions. Unlike Godfrey, who is notwithstanding a writer of some sophistication, he has acknowledged, observed and utilized his region to the optimum. Unlike Ms. Van der Mark in her last Alberta novel, he has adhered to an uncompromisingly realistic mode, making no concessions to the glib transparencies of popular fiction. He allows potentially sentimental responses from his characters about the brotherhood of man (p. 95), he paints occasionally

mystical scenes and apocalyptic revelations (pp. 62, 95, 194), he engages, at times, sentiments which are essentially religious in tone. But unlike Porcsa, who gushes and sermonizes, Kreisel disperses all these glib solutions with a fine sense of irony.

Among these five writers of the sixties, then, technique has been the commodity most in demand. Kreisel's Betrayal is a reminder that a region and its people can spring to life under the hand of an objective observer with an exploring technique.

CHAPTER V

THE SIXTIES: SOME SETBACKS

NOTES

1 Hungry Hills (Toronto: Longman's, 1963), p. 44.

2 Ballad of a Stone-picker (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966), pp. 155-156.

3 "George Ryga and the Lost Country," Canadian Literature, 45 (1970), 39.

4 Under the Brightness of Alien Stars (Montreal: Les Editions Sans le Sou, 1970), p. 169.

5 "Technique as Discovery," in Robert Scholes (ed.), Approaches to the Novel (New York: Chandler, 1966), pp. 141-160.

6 No Englishman Need Apply (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965).

7 F. W. Watt, review of No Englishman Need Apply, University of Toronto Quarterly, 35 (1966), p. 387.

8 Lionel Trilling, "Manners, Morals, and the Novel," in Robert Scholes, Approaches, pp. 121-136.

9 Pride and Prejudice (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1949), p. 102. All references are to this edition.

10 Honey in the Rock (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1966), p. 82.

11 From "The Prairie: A State of Mind," Transactions of the Royal Society of Canada, 6, No. 4 (1968), p. 173.

12 In The Alberta Golden Jubilee Anthology, p. 419.

[13] "The Prairie: A State of Mind," pp. 178-179.

[14] "The Travelling Nude," Prism, I, 1 (1959), p. 13.

[15] "Prairie," p. 173.

[16] In Desmond Pacey (ed.), A Book of Canadian Stories (Toronto: Ryerson, 1962), p. 299.

[17] The Betrayal (1964; rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1971), pp. 57-58. All references are to this edition.

CHAPTER VI

ROBERT KROETSCH

I have noted, in the historical section of chapter I and in the themes of chapter II, that Alberta history illustrates a set of apparent contradictions. For instance, I pointed to the theme of escape to the natural paradise coupled with the ambition to turn it into a prosperous paradise. The apparent contradiction here between natural and civilized values (illustrated by the wild rose vs. the oil derrick motif) is well exposed in the fiction of Mitchell, O'Hagan, Van der Mark and Kroetsch, as well as in the fiction of earlier writers and in the histories of MacInnes, Gillese and MacGregor, to name a few. Another apparent contradiction which I stressed (in chapter I primarily) was that while Alberta's cities and industrial technology seem progressive, its political and religious institutions seem anachronistic. One is of course reminded of these paradoxes when one attends summer festivals like the small town local stampedes, the Calgary Stampede or Edmonton's Klondike Days. The anachronisms of the American west or the wild north are paraded down the main streets amid the modern icons of an industrialized state. This paradox and related ones have been dealt with by historical writers like Archer, Gray, MacPherson, Leacock and several others as well.

In this chapter, I will draw on Robert Kroetsch's own travel book Alberta for several quotations which help, along with his fiction, to focus and define these paradoxes. By doing this I am not attempting to emphasize an already established fact of Alberta history. I am merely illustrating how Kroetsch's historical theory, which draws on rather than challenges the majority of Alberta histories, is practised in his fiction.

"Chaos," says Mike Hornyak. "We've got some chaos to contend with." And he offers Peter Guy a bottle of whiskey. "Contend a little?" he says.[1] Setting the context of this comment aside for a moment, we may take it as Robert Kroetsch's invitation to his reader to encounter life through Kroetsch's eyes. 'Chaos' and 'contend' are favorite words of his.[2] In his travel book Alberta, Kroetsch said the following: "Two views of existence contend here: for some, life is controlled by an apocalyptic vision with the end and judgement always nigh; for others, especially for those who build cities and plan conservation and create schools, Alberta is no longer a promise but a fact." More contentions follow in the chaos which is Alberta. "And now in this beautiful, rich, sad, comic province a creative energy is contending with doubt"(7). "Today the evolution of the earth's surface has brought back optimism and an aggressive concern for the good life to a people who are reluctant to believe in evolution. But Alberta

thrives on its paradoxes. Western hospitality combines with a finely honed sense of how to trim expenses. Openness combines with reserve. And the visible world of Alberta makes manifest this delight in contradictions: the wind carries dust before it brings rain" (6).

But We Are Exiles is Kroetsch's first and shortest novel. Kroetsch's major personages are virtual exiles from the urban community and he therefore draws far more on nature for his images of chaos and dramatic tension than he does in his two subsequent novels. Exiles is primarily a novel of the Mackenzie River Valley but the Alberta scenes are important both to the novel and to the growing body of Alberta sketches in fiction as we shall see. Following are two of the only urban scenes in the novel. Both describe Edmonton.

(1) That was one dream of the North; to take a room for a month in the Selkirk or the King Edward or the MacDonald, and to give parties for all your old pals and all the pretty waitresses and sales girls, and to ring up for more booze and leave ten-dollar tips and keep a taxi waiting while you go to a double feature; and to try on a pair of shoes and tell the clerk to wrap up six pair, and to buy clean shirts by the dozen and throw the dirty ones away (60).

(2) He had tried going out that first fall, but he got to Edmonton and couldn't leave the airport building. He was on his way east, he thought. But he couldn't change airports. He walked out to the circle in front of the terminal in Edmonton and looked at the string of bright yellow taxis waiting to whisk him away, and when a bent wiry man picked up his suitcase he snatched it back and fled into the building-- out of the late

> October sunshine, out of the world of autumn and football games and roaring traffic-- and he slept in a chair until he could catch the next plane going anywhere into the North (58).

The first passage is the dream of Kroetsch's rivermen; the second is their reality. The first passage envisions a connection with the human community; the second realizes their exile from it. Yet for Kroetsch, both passages are equally real. That is, the first passage, because it is an unfulfilled dream, bespeaks an inner reality, the second an exterior reality. The dream (or nightmare) is no less the stuff of fiction than the observable exterior. To Margaret Laurence, Kroetsch made the following comment: "You and I, because we are western Canadians, are involved in making a new literature out of a new experience. As I explore that experience, trying to make both inward and outward connections, I see new possibilities for the story-teller. In the process I have become somewhat impatient with certain traditional kinds of realism, because I think there is a more profound kind available to us."[3] If Kroetsch is, in any sense, to be considered a realist, then, it is necessary to include within the terms of that definition a consideration of these 'inner' realities.

Chaos often results amid the tension between the imagined and the real world. A clear example of this chaos comes to light in some scenes in the Alberta Rockies in Exiles. Peter Guy, Kroetsch's Ontario protagonist, approaches

the province for the first time. His reaction is dramatic: "And then out onto the farmlands again and the wind had its own sound, forlorn, sad to the limits. And far beyond it Kettle was in the cool mountains and bright in a summer dress, the air cool and the rain falling in the afternoon and the sun coming out again after the rain" (138). In this passage, Kettle Fraser is seen in terms of a romanticized image, and seen amid romanticized, (not visualized) surroundings.

The name Kettle suggests, most immediately, a container of water. And in her imagined, romanticized state, she is associated with falling rain. This image springs out of a context of wasteland dryness.

> They drove. Past oilfield pumps, like giant grasshoppers dying of thirst. Past farmers making hay in the ditches. Past cars with racks on top and tarpaulins flying and trailers swaying behind. All of them heading west. Mike whistled past in the Rolls he called his jalopy. And then stopped for milkshakes or beer, and the cars went by again, the same luggage piled high on the same racks and the same tarpaulins flapping. 'Water', Hornyak said. Their bellies ached from too many pineapple milkshakes. 'I'm a walking living drought. There must be water out there ahead' (138).

And they do find water and Kettle when they reach the mountains in Banff. "They followed the Calgary girls, driving lead-footed for the Rockies on a Saturday morning, range after range, of foothills as they topped a rise, up and up from the prairies, past all the hay-fields and into the forest and then the first outcrop of rock and the first mountain stream and

the first lake. 'Water', Hornyak said. 'Dear sweet God, water'" (142-3).

The illusion of spiritual or baptismal rebirth dominates these heavily symbolic pages. Kettle is at the center of these illusions, endowed with romantic qualities. "She was beautiful. Her lips and her breasts and God she was beautiful; her pale blue dress neatly ironed, her shoulders newly tanned; and her ears that the sun could not touch and her black hair piled in a coil and her body slim in the cool morning. 'The mountains', Peter said. 'I hadn't seen the mountains before'" (143).

Kroetsch subtly brings his three personages (Guy, Kettle and Michael Hornyak) down to earth again in the following passage which begins in the illusory images of baptismal rebirth and ends in a fall to reality. As usual, Kroetsch's observations are rooted to the concrete Alberta scene.

> And that afternoon they found the stream. The water pouring down the mountain, past the Upper Hot Springs pools. Hot and smelling of sulphur, from somewhere high on the cold mountain. Two old women were sitting on a towel, soaking their swollen feet.
>
> 'Look', Peter said. 'Those two old ladies. We saw them get on the bus.'
>
> 'This is it!' Mike shouted. He slammed on the brakes. 'We've found it! Quick! Get out!' And he left the Rolls in the middle of the road, horns honking. 'Run!'
>
> They took off their shoes. They sat with their feet in the hundred-degree water in the sunlight on the mountain-side. The smell of pine and spruce over the smell of sulphur. Kettle with her dress up past her knees and Peter grinning and Hornyak kneeling in the spring, trying to get closer.
>
> And when they started to sing, to laugh, a wrinkled old man who couldn't die came out from behind a rock wall:

> 'Take your feet out of that damned water.' Which made them stop singing. He yelled again and ignored the two old women and shook a fist and started down the hill. And they took their feet out of the water. They wiped them on Mike's and Peter's socks and put on their shoes and brushed their seats.
>
> 'You're supposed to pay. Up there,' the guard called.
>
> 'You can't pay,' Mike yelled back. 'Not to be reborn.'
>
> And the three of them felt robbed. Cheated. Sad to the limits (144).

Thus far, we have seen Kroetsch endowing his region with an ambivalent set of associations, the images of gain and of loss. But this is really what he is doing throughout the novel, endowing his other region (The Mackenzie River), his characters, his whole plot with an obvious ambivalence. When Peter Guy is cast adrift on Barge 301, he faces death but also a release from guilt and from the deathlike influence of Hornyak. At one moment on the barge he sees "a chaos of water and sky, confused in the tangle of snow. But those prairie nights; we saw lakes and we drove and the lakes turned out to be sky" (140). On the prairies Hornyak and Guy needed water; on the barge Guy needed heat and dry land. When Guy was engaged to Kettle, Hornyak showed him how to be free of her. But Hornyak, the free spirit, having found Kettle, must become married to her. Yet with half their being, these men want something else: Guy wants Kettle back (and eventually wins her); Hornyak wants his freedom again. And furthermore both men want what the other has to such an extent that, in a sense, they want to be their friend. Hornyak

envies Guy's name and established family tree, as well as wanting his fiancee. Guy envies Hornyak's freedom from convention and from conscience. As the plot progresses, the ambivalent associations multiply.

What is important here, is Kroetsch's use of region in general, and his use of water in particular. The Alberta scenes elicit wondrous illusions and grim realities and therefore provide suggestive props for Kroetsch's ambivalent thematic tensions. Kroetsch's use of water imagery objectifies these tensions so that he need only suggest them and not state them. As her name would anticipate, Kettle is surrounded by watery images. Water brings life to the dry countryside but brings death to the drowning man. It is the baptismal stuff of rebirth and it is the treacherous river. Kettle, too, carries with her the suggestions of refuge and of confinement. These suggestions come out in her relationship with both men. For instance, when Guy finds her in bed with Hornyak, he is struck by two consequences: the tragedy of fleeing from Kettle and the necessity to do so: ". . . he believed he did not want to believe what he saw, the eloquence of flesh and desire caught dispassionately in the glass mirror inside the door; and even if he tried not to believe he turned and fled and kept on fleeing north. . ." (48).

Hornyak, with a tattoo on his arm of a ship in full sail, chooses to die by drowning (or at least Guy fears this).

Guy drifts toward death and atonement inside Hornyak's coffin on a boat caught in a squall. The water and the woman promise a whole range of possibilities: life, death, confinement, freedom, atonement. Kroetsch makes no attempt to subdue these ambivalent possibilities. The novel is generated by the spirit of doubt.

In writing Exiles, Kroetsch worked largely with natural terrain and well known tourist vistas. Like McCourt and O'Hagan, for instance, he endows the Alberta Rockies with ambivalent associations. In his next novel The Words of My Roaring (1966) Kroetsch chooses to explore the same basic tensions as he did in Exiles, but in a comic vein. This time, however, Kroetsch relies not only on the ambivalent associations of natural terrain, but on the potentially chaotic associations of the social terrain. The Words of My Roaring springs spontaneously out of Alberta history. Writers have done considerable work in sketching in this period.

The subregion from which Words arises is on the northern perimeter of the Hanna district. The history of this region was written by Jean Burnet: Next-Year Country (1951).[5] It is roughly the area from which Lina Ashley and her family migrated in In Due Season and to which Dan Root came in Honey in the Rock. The time in Kroetsch's novel, as in both of Ms. Van der Mark's, is the middle of the hungry thirties.

Burnet's history of the district is interesting for its grim catalogue of tragedies which conspired to bring about

the district's nickname 'Next-Year Country'. The strain of the depression, Burnet says, is relieved by "a stress upon next year's prospects. Pope's couplet, 'Hope springs eternal in the human breast:/Man never is, but always to be, blest,' is apt as an expression of the dry-belt farmer's outlook" (28). Excessive drinking, suicide and a need for evangelizing all resulted from the hardships in this area as Burnet points out (see especially pp. 146 and 149). Interestingly, these three causal phenomena (that is, drunkenness, suicide and the need for evangelical blessings) are given prominence in Kroetsch's Words. Stephen Leacock quips "Nature itself took a hand and scourged him (the farmer) with drought and visited him with locusts to remind him to read his Bible."[6]

Burnet's history is scattered with local anecdotes collected from the farmers of the district, many of which anecdotes he classifies as gallows humour. The following is an example: "For instance there are the stories of the gophers who have to get down on their knees to reach the scanty grass . . ." (28). Burnet's source for this tale might well have been the source (perhaps via the oral tradition) of Johnny Backstrom's remark: "The gophers had to kneel down to get a bite to eat" (Words, 76).

In another history of the times, Aberhart of Alberta, it is made abundantly clear that the people's problems were confronted by men who were more theocrats than politicians.[7]

During the crisis year, 1935, the year in which Aberhart achieved his landslide victory, his political radio broadcasts opened with the singing of the official theme song, "O God Our Help in Ages Past."[8] Johnny Backstrom, Kroetsch's protagonist in Words, offers his opinion of Aberhart's song: "I love music, yet I am not indiscriminate; and just as the twilight turned to dark, over the airwaves came a chorus of voices: 'O God Our Help in Ages Past.' A song to which I have mixed responses" (92). The first two lines of the hymn read as follows: "O God our help in ages past,/ Our hope in years to come." It is interesting that in the novel that second line is never stated. The sad irony (Johnny's 'mixed response') which proceeds from the optimistic first line is that God's help is a thing of the past. Appropriately, Kroetsch's inscription is from one of David's Psalms, emphasizing man's alienation from his god: "Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?" It is from the spiritual flavour of the Eastern Alberta of the thirties that Words draws its regional character.

The novel Exiles, as I have shown, depended upon the dramatic tourist vistas of the Banff mountains for its theme of youthful disenchantment. And further, it draws upon the lonely and sometimes barren landscape of the Mackenzie drainage system for its theme of alienation; in other words, for both themes the novel gains its regional character from

natural rather than human history. But Words depends for its basic themes and tensions upon provincial history and the religious eccentricities which emerged from this history. During the scorching years of depression and drought, the pre-eminence of apocalyptic sermons and the predominance of 'doom prophets' has been a dominant theme in Alberta history.[9] The Aberhart of Kroetsch's novel (John George Applecart) gives voice to this apocalyptic spirit, the dawning of the millenium. The following are fragments from his radio broadcast which from time to time is interrupted by Johnny Backstrom's own agonized roaring. "We must not relax from our striving. The enemy is upon us like a vulture from the sky. We would compound our ruin and woe. . . . We are plagued. . .We have been plagued. But we shall be delivered from our plague and pain, for out of pain comes deliverance. . . .The fourth angel. . . . poured out his vial upon the sun; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. And men were scorched with great heat. . ." (92-95).

Applecart's speech is really an adaptation of part of the Book of Revelation. His political rhetoric is full of the biblical imagery of doom. So is the warning of the little prophet who appears and reappears throughout the novel to announce the end of the world: "The world. . . is coming to an end tomorrow. Get rid of your earthly possessions. Prepare for the final judgement" (81).

Kroetsch's depression-crazed region provides ready-made political and religious tensions for the dramatic tensions comprising his theme: the chaos emerging from the disappearance of old gods and the appearance of new ones. Applecart, if not the voice incarnate of the old god, is certainly the intermediary between that god and the people. And of course he is deaf to the words of Johnny's roaring.

> I was embarrassed at my own outbreak of shouting. Ordinarily in a funeral parlour you never raise your voice. But there the radio was standing, a console model, where I usually put the coffin, and the voice was coming out full blast. Eerie, I found it. Thank God I have no superstitions. I had to shout. I went and turned up the volume as high as it would go, I asked no quarter, and I shouted back at it: 'Explain! Explain!' I shouted.
>
> Follow me, is all that voice would say. That hollow voice. Send in your contributions. 'Send in your nickels,' Applecart said, 'your dimes, your precious dollars my dear friends.' He paused; and I heard the gurgle of water. 'For remember,' Applecart said. 'Remember that promise. Do as I ask you. And there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there by any pain--'
>
> 'A pig's arse!' I shouted (96).

Old ideologies and old codes of honour, like old gods, have to die in the wake of new ones. And Doc Murdoch voices these fading codes. He is father to Helen (Johnny's extra-marital lover) and, one suspects, Johnny's father as well (see especially pp. 23, 63, 71, 153, 184, and 191). He is a man of benevolent though rigid moral upbringing, a man devoted to his medical practice and to the many people whom he has served, both as a doctor and as a politician. He brings Johnny into the world and performs the function of the life-bringer

to the community. Like Helen, Jonah, the walleyed farmer, and others in the Notikeewin constituency, Doc Murdoch is victimized by Johnny. In the following scene Murdoch commiserates with Johnny over the misfortunes of life. It is a wonderfully comic scene, Johnny's pathos notwithstanding.

> 'You've got to buck up,' the Doc said.
> 'Buck up all right,' I said. 'You bend over, the hobnails get you in the arse. You straighten up, they get you in the balls. It's a fifty-fifty proposition."
> 'Now wait,' the Doc said. 'Jonah-- You should consider--'
> 'Consider indeed,' I said. 'I considered and I'm done and finished with considering. With feeling. With worrying. With trying to solve the problems of the damned world. With trying to make ends meet. With women. With politics--'
> The Doc stubbed out his cigarette, only one quarter of it smoked. I could never do that; if I started smoking I'd have to smoke the butt on a toothpick or just simply learn to burn my fingers. As generous as I am, certain kinds of economy obsess me. Someday I'm going to murder my wife for the way she peels potatoes; she throws away more than she uses, by God, time after time. A man should keep hogs (67).

In many passages like the one above, Kroetsch has given Backstrom a chaotic, rudderless style of narrative. He switches impulsively, in the above passage, from an emotional crisis, to Murdoch's butting of a cigarette, to the art of smoking economically, to his wife's wastefulness, to the economic virtue of keeping pigs. Backstrom is the embodiment of the chaos of which the universe, his universe, is composed. In this universe the old verities of Applecart and Murdoch disappear. For example, the name Judas suggests a man "misunderstood and misrepresented" (44-45). Johnny's middle name is Judas, and in traditional terms, he justifies his name

creating martyrs for his own ends (the clown, the Doc, Helen, the walleyed farmer and Jonah).

When the old gods die a new spirit comes forth, and Johnny is both the embodiment and the spokesman of that new spirit. As a Judas (or creator of martyrs) and an undertaker (a Hermes or a Pluto figure of the dark underworld) he is well qualified to preach the new theology, a theology which confronts the fact of death. Here is Johnny's unspoken sermon.

> Death, I would say. Death my dear brethren. In the name of the Father and so on. You must die. You deserve to die. I deserve to die. Then I'd hesitate. Let that sink in. And after, in a stronger voice, my hands threatening to rise again, threatening to close but not quite making it: But why must the good die? Models be damned. Who wants models? Give them a few tough questions. Why must the good be ripped out of this happy existence? Out of these present joys. I ask you, I ask you. Away from the joys of the daily dawn. Back into darkness, away from the sheer joy of seeing it's all there again, the warm old bed smelling faintly of your own comfort, the open window, the fresh morning sky. From the sheer blissful joy of just stretching a little and then having a quiet scratch. Yes, my dear brethren, I scratch in the morning . I'm human, and my wife shortly thereafter in her limited vocabulary reprimands my humanity. My manhood. But I rise to cups of fresh coffee. To the smell of toast, burnt or otherwise, to gobs of melting butter and strawberry jam and to the question, Why must the good be hammered and nailed into oblivion? Into darkness away from family and friends? From the little children they support and the people they love? By God, that widow wouldn't be crying alone up there in the front pew with five little tots too small to know what was going on. She wouldn't be alone. That congregation wouldn't be sitting there half-embarrassed because a woman was crying her head off. Why? I'd say. I'll tell you why. You and I deserve death. We who will not govern our passions. We who shilly-shally with the temptations of the flesh, the pleasures of the bottle. The useless daily pleasures of bragging and swearing and

sleeping late and avoiding work. The jerk-offs. But what about the good man? Then I'd pause. I'd let my arms go slack, my shoulders sloping in a gesture of despair. He doesn't deserve to die. And then in a rising voice again, my shoulders squaring under that black outfit, my basic toughness showing through from under that disguise. But he dies-- he is forced to die-- that one good man is forced to die by a conspiracy of greed and selfishness, by the betrayals of his dearest friends, by the connivings of the constipated rich, by the collaborations of the deceived poor. I wanted to shout in Murdoch's ear; I wanted to jar him out of his old slumbering. He is forced to die, that one good man-- he is forced to die-- in pain and anguish and misery-- he is forced to die by the stinking unholy minions and tycoon high- muckie-muck--

But a bell was ringing. A bell rang, a bell saying, gross, gross, gross. Three little sounds that dinned in my head. Dinned and roared. The old din and roar again.

Gross, gross. My appetites. My longings. My dreams. My deceptions. My fantasies. My bottomless gullet. My grasping huge fists. My insatiable hunger not just for something but for everything. Gross unto death (145-146).

Having confronted the inevitability of death and the futility of the moral life (as seen in the example of Murdoch, Applecart, Jonah and others), Backstrom offers a solution of his own: "Good God, life is short. Life is short, short, my body cried. So live, it said. Live, live. Rage, roar" (144).

And the sensualist who knows nothing of restraint or the joys of life after death is capable of moments of intense (dare I say religious?) beauty.

Man, it felt good, just to be half-loaded and the pressure easing up in your bladder and the old tool held firmly in the right hand. For that one beautiful moment you feel you've spent a lifetime looking for a place to pee, and here you've found it. We watered the parched earth. You could hear water running, and that was a mighty pleasant change. Oh show me the way to go home. That clear sky above all rashed over with millions of stars and the baked earth letting out the breath it had held all day; the cowshit and buckbrush and a drying slough

> hole scenting the air; a little rank yet fertile with hope. It felt good. Giving yourself a flick or two. Three is playing, somebody said-- one of Jonah's triplet friends, in an old blue suit coat and a worn red tie. And wild roses in the glare of the headlights, a little dusty, but full of colour because no rain had washed the petals white. The telephone line; the poles all throbbing, setting up a hum that lulled the sleeping grasshoppers (16-17).

The song in the above passage is "Show Me the Way to Go Home," and is taken up again on the disastrous ride home. The song provides an ironic undertone of sadness and alienation which underlies the whole novel. In many ways Johnny is confronted with the dilemma implied by Kroetsch's inscription: "Why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring". He cannot embrace fully the new spirit, nor can he reject fully the old gods. Backstrom is cursed with a consciousness of his own connivings and his own gross appetites.

Hearkening back to a statement of Kroetsch at the beginning of this essay (quoted from Kroetsch's Alberta) one is reminded of the contention of old and new gods: "Two views of existence contend here: for some life is controlled by an apocalyptic vision with the end and judgement always nigh; for others, especially for those who build cities and plan conservation and create schools, Alberta is no longer a promise but a fact." The tensions which tear at Johnny's soul are like the tensions which polarize the provincial consciousness. Backstrom is very much a product of his region.

The novel ends on a note of hope. The day of doom, predicted by Applecart and the prophet, does not come.

Instead, rain comes, and Backstrom moves forward with momentary penitence to take on his responsibilities in the community. As in Exiles, the water imagery is endowed with interesting ambiguities. It drowns Jonah. It embellishes Helen (like Kettle) in a cluster of life-giving images. And it saves Johnny Backstrom's drought-stricken community. Backstrom is humble enough to realize that he did not bring on the rain himself. But the people apotheosize him. His blind luck notwithstanding, he has created faith and hope.

Earlier in this chapter I alluded to the mythical counterparts (Judas and Pluto or Hermes) to Johnny Backstrom's demonic aspect. A brief look at his heroic side reveals Kroetsch's invocation of other mythical constructs generally of a messianic nature. Johnny is like the hero of medieval romance or biblical epic whose birth and early life is shrouded in speculation. We are not certain who Johnny's father is, and some of his early years were spent in the east. Sometimes the hero of romance is able, after a struggle with an opponent, to restore the land to its original fertility. Johnny, according to his superstitious worshipers, brings the rains. And the hero, with his super-human feats, creates faith. Of course Johnny does this, perhaps even more effectively than Applecart. With the exception of David, whose psalm is quoted in Kroetsch's inscription, there are no specific allusions in Words to the heroes of old romance or biblical epics (such as Arthur, Redcrosse or perhaps Oedipus).

But the pattern exemplified by their stories fits the pattern of the popular myth which has been built around Backstrom by the end of the novel. Kroetsch's invocation of messianic associations helps to round off his protagonist, redeeming him from an unscrupulous rogue to the stature of a saintly picaro. Also, the messianic role is one which arises naturally out of Alberta's depression years. What might surprise our hypothetical American critic, had he not the benefit of the regional scholar's guidance, is that Words is in many ways a realistic novel. Backstrom accomplished in the fictional community of Coulee Hill no more than Aberhart accomplished in many rural Alberta communities. The miracles of conversion celebrated by Ralph Connor and the miracles of Christian political leadership celebrated by Nellie McClung (Kroetsch read both of these authors)[10] have been revived and, at the same time, demystified in Kroetsch's Words.

Underlying the tensions of this novel are a yearning for lost innocence (the verities of the fundamentalist beliefs, for instance) and an opposite tendency toward the sensual espousal of experience. This same tension emerges in the inscription from The Studhorse Man (1969): "Alas! Alas! that evere love was synne!"[11] The tension is basic to nearly all of Kroetsch's canon. In the only major study of Kroetsch's works, Professor M. Ross has provided some much needed illumination of Kroetsch's basic artistic concerns, related

to the tensions I have been discussing. Kroetsch's novels, he says, are "graphic parables of the ways in which efforts to gratify needs, even lusts for significant experience generate moral consequences."[12] Kroetsch himself, labelling this tension, says, "control and chaos, or morality and liberation from that."[13] These are his basic oppostions.

At the beginning of this study I mentioned that Kroetsch was a novelist who was unique among Alberta novelists. This is so because he not only recognizes the vanity of the romantic quest engendered by his own region, but he is also willing to mock that romanticism. One sees an advancement in this process from Kroetsch's earliest novel, But We Are Exiles, to his next two novels. Exiles succeeds in debunking romantic myths by adding a new twist to an old Canadian poem: "Fair these broad meads, these hoary woods are grand:/But we are all exiles from our fathers' land."[14] That is, this novel renders the experience of alienation amid the pristine beauty of the landscape. But not until Words and Studhorse can Kroetsch bring himself to mock the hitherto inviolate gravity of romantic love.

In Exiles Kroetsch treats Peter Guy's encounter with Hornyak with high seriousness. Guy is like a Hemingway hero, stoically hiding his disenchantment, drifting inexorably toward death.[15] Hornyak is a partial threat to him, the homme moyen sensuel who consumes all and provokes jealousy in him. So in Exiles, the theme of romantic disenchantment is rendered

in a tragic spirit unrelieved by comedy, and in this sense, akin to O'Hagan's and McCourt's treatment of the same theme.

In Words and Studhorse, however, this chaotic, consumptive force embodied by Hornyak in Exiles is made the subject of profane comedy. Johnny Backstrom and Hazard Lepage have lost the threat previously associated with Hornyak. And the force of order and control embodied by Peter Guy in Exiles is diminished in a sense. That is, characters who partake of Peter Guy's self disciplined control and his need for ordering reality (Jonah Bledd or Doc Murdoch) are much less interesting to Kroetsch in Words than a consumptive rogue like Johnny Backstrom. And the jealousy of Demeter Proudfoot, aroused by Hazard Lepage, is rooted in comedy. Studhorse is a comic reworking of the Guy-Hornyak-Kettle triangle of Exiles. Kroetsch seems to have acknowledged that Hornyak is as much a part of the conglomerate symbol of man as Guy is, that they are two aspects of the same man. And he exploits this acknowledgement, this acceptance, in his next two novels. Peter Guy is the disciplined mind, Hornyak the wild body; and it is the latter aspect which, more often than not, is celebrated at the expense of the former. Kroetsch's three novels, then, begin in the tragedy and turbulence of the unfulfilled romantic quest and progress to a comic position which distances and refines these turbulent feelings. In his last two novels one gains a sense of Kroetsch's greater control over his subject matter.

To illustrate further Kroetsch's progression and refinement of his subject matter, I have chosen to look at a prominent motif of Kroetsch's, the fear of death. This motif, as Kroetsch treats it, is related to the apocalyptic doom so prominent in Words; the death motif in both books partakes of its fundamentalist region. Here is a dream sequence of Hazard Lepage's from Chapter III of The Studhorse Man. It suggests a new trend in Alberta fiction from landscape to inscape.

> The bones rattled. There in the darkness the bones chattered and talked. Hazard lay on a winter of bones: skulls and hoofs and hipbones, vertebrae and scapulae, ribs and pelvises and stray jaws with only a few teeth missing, knuckle-bones in need of only slight repair. The very beast dismantled: bones beat white by the sun, polished by dust on dust, scoured by the slow drift of wind and rain. Bones blasted, dying into the cold earth; bones plowed from the earth, raised out of the dark by the night's frost. The lost bones of time, cracked and broken, the ache all rotted back into oblivion; only the stark form left, reminding him that pain too is brief and maybe to be treasured. Oh, how I understand. Bones sprouting and growing from the very dark itself. Hazard put on a green celluloid visor against the vision that would not speak. She would not hear him; Martha would not speak her recognition but only stared with her sea-green eyes, her cold, imperious, wondering, pleading-- O Lord have mercy-- condemning green eyes. Hazard put on his visor and now he tapped a message against her unrelenting gaze: STOP, he hammered on the key. He would not pause now. STOP, he sent again. STOP STOP STOP, he tapped. He heard the message he must send to Martha. The blizzard blew, the snow drifted into the cattle's coats, the ice closed over their nostrils and eyes. STOP, he wired. STOP STOP STOP STOP. Buffalo galloped in a hot roaring frenzy to the cliff's edge beside the lake, by Hazard's mansion, galloped into a moment when it was too late to turn, into a tall and breath-long leap and a hump of twisted necks and broken legs. And the Cree squaws, prouder than men, leveled their silent killing guns, lunged, brave with knives that drew no blood.

> But the bones rattled, untouched and alone they rattled. STOP STOP, he was pleading now. STOP. He took his hand off the key and the key went on sending its single word, on and on it tapped, STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP STOP (21-22).

Hazard Lepage, during this dream, is being borne away from his country residence toward the city in a boxcar full of buffalo bones (and one Indian skull). Kroetsch's theme in this novel is the plight of natural energies in the face of modern mechanization, the plight, in other words, of the old west giving way to the new. What the biographer, Demeter Proudfoot, refers to as Hazard's preposterous fear of death (11), has very wide application in this novel. The bones upon which Hazard is lying not only remind him of his own imminent death, but of the death of the old west. His fear of superannuation, through the dying out of his line of stallions due to mechanization, is a variation upon the motif of apocalyptic fear as I intimated earlier.

In Exiles one came away with a sense of the fear of death laced through with the smell of corpses. In Words, that fear is slightly mitigated by comic overtones. But in Studhorse this fear of death is refined and distanced to such an extent that, in the above dream, it takes on a transformation into universal terms. When Hazard taps out STOP to the dream vision of Martha, he is not simply requesting that the train stop (to end his quest at Martha's ranch), or that Martha stop wanting him for her husband (which would end

his quest as well). He is the last voice of the old west calling out from the "lost bones of time" for all of time to stop.

In this latest novel Kroetsch's dissatisfaction with traditional kinds of realism has revealed itself in a strikingly new (for Alberta) approach to the novel. To F. J. Niven, who wrote of these same buffalo bones, confronting their tragedy directly, with his heart sometimes on his sleeve, Kroetsch's dream sequence might seem obscure, the contamination of reality by dream. But Kroetsch argues, as I mentioned earlier, that there is a profounder reality than the external reality. There is an inner reality which for Kroetsch (drawing on Joyce, Kafka, Beckett, Barth and many others) is more 'real.' Any way one can map that inner reality is a legitimate approach to the novel. Niven specialized in landscape; Kroetsch's Studhorse is an exercise in inscape. Of this, Professor Ross says Kroetsch has begun a "shift in his interest from a mimetic to an expressive theory of art in which the experiencing consciousness is of more concern than that which is experienced" (20). As we shall see shortly, that consciousness shows more than a trace of its region in it.

While a traditional realist might picture Hazard's grim figure riding in the boxcar or try to capture the exterior images of a freezing pile of bones, Kroetsch attempts through the dream to partake of the entire romance of the west that

was and of the entire mythos of man and beast. In his forthcoming Alberta novel Gone Indian Kroetsch renders the Indian consciousness through its legends. In Studhorse he approaches consciousness through dreams and mythic welters.

By "mythic welters" I am referring to the purposeful confusion of myths clustered in one character and used to objectify any number of dispositions within the character. An example is Johnny Backstrom. At various times throughout Words he can be said to invoke the mythical trappings of Judas, Hermes, Oedipus and a number of messianic moses-like heroes. But these trappings, in Words, are often vague and undefined. In Studhorse they are explicit. In Demeter Proudfoot we have Oedipus, Tiresias, Telemachus, Gulliver, and of course Demeter.[16] To a western Canadian writer, the technical mastery of this welter technique is probably more convenient than the pursuit of single archetypes because writers are still searching for ways of coming to terms with the West's human and geographical diversity. In other words they are still seeking universalizing correlatives from other literatures and other mythologies to incorporate into the stories of their own region. Says Kroetsch, "Canadians are now undergoing this exciting and painful experience of meeting themselves. We used to have to read everybody else's literature. All of a sudden, here are books about us! [We are discovering] our own complexity, our own contradictions."[17]

To capture this complexity and these contradictions, Kroetsch's Canadian characters are endowed with multiple, archetypal associations.

Within the purposeful confusions of Hazard Lepage's manyfaceted welter of mythic associations, the figure of Proteus emerges as a useful source of illumination.[18] Proteus is the traditional son (or companion) of Poseidon who cares for Poseidon's flocks. He was an oracle who prophesied only under duress. He could change his shape or his opinions at will, so the questioner (like Demeter Proudfoot) would have to use a great deal of persistence. Hazard's history is one of changing outward forms dictated by his less than stable life style. At the beginning of the novel he is dressed in the frontierish garb of this calling. But he also assumes the role of the studhorse and hence is just as often in his birthday suit. After his romantic interlude with P. Cockburn he is dressed as a redcoat. After his stay at the convent of Sister Raphael, he is dressed as a minister. He is pursued as a murderer and mourned as a corpse. In myth Poseidon represented the mighty sea deity (Neptune), and as well in the novel, Poseidon is something of a god. In myth, Poseidon was attended by Proteus. In Studhorse, Poseidon is the enraged deity which destroys Lepage at the end of his quest, squashing him, appropriately, into a formless protean mass (p. 165). As Proteus, Hazard can take on the archetypal shape of Noah, Odysseus, Satan or other figures in myth with

amoebic facility.

The schizophrenic Demeter Proudfoot is ostensibly the author of the welter of mythological associations which arise from the characters in Studhorse. He is actually a skillful embodiment of one of Kroetsch's own tendencies in writing: to impose 'imported' myths upon his region in order to "discover our own complexity." The process of Hazard's role playing, that is his habit of changing his outward form and as well changing his mission, has its analogue in Kroetsch's searching technique. He creates a biographer who forces his subject into a number of roles usually with mythological overtones. But the biographer allows us to see that these roles are inadequate to contain his subject. For example, Hazard is a very unwilling Odysseus. He is not noble or heroic enough. He is too fickle to his calling and to his woman. And therefore he must be Proteus. Or to state this compulsion in terms of its artistic allegory: Demeter's subject must be elusive and don the uniforms emblematic of early Alberta historical figures (the wrangler, the sky pilot, the mountie, the lawbreaker, etc). This coincides with Kroetsch's attempts to "reconstruct time" in a region whose identity is only now emerging. One is reminded in this novel that the sense of self discovery in process is very much alive in Alberta writing today.

When Nellie McClung or Isabel Paterson imposed their domestic imagery upon the very undomesticized Alberta terrain,

they envinced no consciousness of this imposition. Or when Ralph Connor imposed his imported scenery and his imported redemption formula upon his Alberta subjects, he showed no consciousness of his impositions. But Kroetsch, more than any Alberta writer examined here, has written with a consciousness of the futility and the necessity of imposing alien literary formulae on his region. I say 'necessity' for (as Kroetsch well knows) regional tales, if they spring honestly out of their region, can take on universal significance when they are erected mythopoeically upon supra-regional scaffolds.

We have an example of this process in Kroetsch's constant recourse to the Oedipus myth. Ralph Connor spoke in Oedipal tones for a generation of men without women. And many writers, discussed in Chapter II, followed his example (or inherited the prevalent attitude which Connor exemplified) in speaking in restrained or sentimentalized tones of women, or in simply not talking about women within the context of love relationships. Kroetsch, with some justification, has discerned this attitude in men around him (and perhaps in himself as a young man). I do not mean that Kroetsch considers 'the Alberta man' to be sexually repressed. Nor do I mean that in this fundamentalist stronghold, male frigidity is endemic according to Robert Kroetsch (or anybody else). But there are indications, of which Kroetsch is no doubt aware, that Alberta history and fiction have lent themselves

to a pronounced influx of romantic questers. Geographical fact (unusual beauty and riches) has impinged upon a state of moral tension (the conflict between espousing the wilderness as it is and conquering it for profit). Repressed guilt and shallow moralizing consequently arose in the region's literature.[19] And the figure of Demeter Proudfoot (translated 'Oedipus') comes to represent a whole range of dispositions (repressed desire, disdain for big business, euphemistic approach to man's barbarousness, romantic weakness for the natural beauties of the old west, etc.) which find respondent notes in the history and fiction of Alberta. The Oedipus myth merely provides a convenient skeletal structure upon which Demeter can hang these dispositions and flesh them out.

Kroetsch's mythicizing is closely related to his feeling for the 'oppositions' and 'contradictions' which he attributes to his region. Demeter tells us that "Martha would not speak her recognition but only stared with her sea-green eyes, her cold, imperious, wondering, pleading-- O Lord have mercy-- condemning green eyes." These sea-green eyes attract and repel Hazard. Like the sea they promise life and destruction. Martha gives life to Hazard but she puts an end to his quest and, in a sense, kills him. She brings about the conditions for his 'death at sea' under the hoofs of Poseidon, and in a scene resonant with verbal oppositions, she gives Hazard life.

> What a moment of astonishment she must have known, mastering that sturdy pillar of the night. I should write an address to intending censors-- you judges in skirts that conceal your mortal manhood, read slowly, and then but gently give rebuke to those who would emulate your privilege. Martha was champion against our promised end. Death was a nightmare presence bent on snuffing Hazard into a longer darkness; it was the crone and succubus, the ancient fiend turned female that in the night of a dream has fatal intercourse with men. Yes, and the moon was a cold bright disc on the sky: Mare Frigoris, Mare Hiemis, Mare Incognito. But Martha strove against those seas of dust like Heracles against the hate of Diomedes and his man-eating mares. Martha was all curiosity to understand, to feel; and the mystery took form in her hand, became unshriveled and yet more the mystery, at once silk smooth and iron hard, boneless becoming bone of blood. There was no tree of knowledge to equal that one in her will to know, no ladder and no hill. Axis mundi, the wise men tell us, and on it the world turns (153).

Let us connect a few of these verbal oppositions cited above. The 'Mare' homophone suggests the sea (la mer), the mother (la mère), the female horse, and is the prefix for three words which are simultaneously life and death for Hazard: Marie (Eshpeter), Martha (Proudfoot) and marriage. Marie Eshpeter enslaves Hazard, puts his horse into a mechanized form of servicing, but heals Hazard's wounds. Martha resurrects him but puts an end to his odyssey through her marriage to him. The mare (female horse) is generally associated with life forces in the first half of the novel, but under the supervision of Eugene Utter, the mare (through its production of estrogen) becomes a sterile force. The sea, which as a life source is the mother of all, is the metaphorical vessel in which Kroetsch's hero ultimately drowns.

Kroetsch's water imagery, associated as it is with women and death, then, is consistent throughout the three

novels. The chaos of oppositions as seen in the ambivalence of nature is one of Kroetsch's fascinations. It is interesting to see the ambivalences Kroetsch creates with mice, perhaps the commonest wild animal on the prairies. One of Hazard Lepage's several aspects of the mythic welter he presents to us is that of a dark underworld figure associated with death, perhaps Hermes, perhaps Satan. He is often seen emerging from grave-like holes (p. 8) or piles of bones (p. 22) or merely dark enclosures. Or he is seen with a four-tined fork (p. 9). He is not just a martyr (p. 142), he is also a debaucher and seducer. He is often surrounded by mice who as well emerge from the underworld: from holes, haystacks, sawdust and piles of bones (see especially p. 112). They are mentioned in connection with plagues, scurviness, marriage ceremonies and death. And like Hazard, they fornicate and multiply with great ease. They are part of the ecological life chain (which Hazard in his fertility symbolizes) and part of the detested underworld (like Hazard as well).

Also of regional interest is the fact that in Kroetsch's two exclusively Alberta novels, Words and Studhorse, the success story combines with either a happy ending (in Words) or at least a ray of hope (in Studhorse). In Words, the rain comes and Johnny, as we find out in Studhorse, is elected. In Studhorse, Martha's child is born, a reputed

"lover of the horse" (175), thus ensuring the survival of the natural functions as Hazard has represented them. And Martha and Eugene Utter are wed and presumably live the prosperous bourgeois life of a successful Alberta couple. They sell their home-grown product to an American firm. It is quite reasonable to assume that Kroetsch's switch, since Exiles, from tragic to comic writing was effected because Kroetsch's natural metier was comedy. Kroetsch's comic incidents, however, usually proceed with dark undercurrents to them: Swiftian denouncements of mankind, evocations of men and animals suffering, reminders that death, sometimes violent and meaningless, is the end of life. Unlike W. O. Mitchell at his most comic, Kroetsch's ironic awareness of the light and dark implications of incident allows him to ground his stories in a palpable albeit distorted sense of reality.

Kroetsch's natural metier may be comedy or comic satire, but it is equally reasonable to conclude that Kroetsch's region, which he reproduces with scrupulous fidelity, lends itself best to comic or satiric interpretation, a thing which seems to go hand in hand with success stories. There was a zaniness to Social Credit politics which, now that the party is nearing extinction, seems laughable in our own time. Zaniness and success stories militate against a truly tragic spirit. The desolation of a novel like As For Me and My House emerges quite naturally from its setting (Saskatchewan, the

1930's); happy illusions, which mountains, Mannings, and money could provide, were rarely forthcoming there.

I have noted the tourist vistas of Banff and their importance in Exiles. I have also noted the political eccentricity of Alberta and its importance in Words. I will now examine some closely observed scenes set between Edmonton and Stettler in Studhorse. Success stories abound.

> Fortunately God in His infinite mercy has strewn the the roads of Alberta with empty beer bottles that might be picked up and sold at twenty cents a dozen. This manna, revealed in abundance by the melting snow was sufficient to keep Hazard alive.
>
> If you look at a map of Alberta you will recognize that, travelling from Mrs. Lank's stump ranch eastward into the parklands, Hazard must inevitably have driven along the road that is visible from my bathroom window.
>
> By a fortunate combination of light and reflection, I am able to see out of my window without leaving my bathtub. A mirror is so placed that I have been able to sit for hours, attempting to imagine what in fact did happen (allowing for the reversal of the image) exactly where I imagine it. It is then time that I must reconstruct not space (85).

Kroetsch leaves us a clue to his methods of observation in the latter two paragraphs of the above passage. He mirrors the spatial images of his region. Although his narrator often delights in mythically distorting and fantasizing the incidents which happen in times past ("It is then time that I must reconstruct"), he draws the spatial phenomena of his region faithfully. Like scenes in "The Man in the Winter Catalogue," some of these scenes are

> surreal almost
> nightmarish, maybe.
> like tripping, eh?

a fable, perhaps.
but always Edmonton,
The Gateway to the North.
(insert symbols where appropriate)[20]

Chapter VI of Studhorse (too long to quote here), is a good example of Kroetsch's 'spatial mirror.' Hazard, working as always with the explosive forces of nature, has released close to a thousand doomed horses from the Edmonton stockyards in the middle of a traffic paralyzing blizzard. In his search for Poseidon he witnesses the chaos he has helped to set in motion. All the landmarks are there in this chaotic baedeker of Edmonton's downtown section: the Saskatchewan River Valley, Jasper Avenue, 101st Street, the Exhibition Grounds, McDougall Church, the Rialto Theatre, the Palace of Sweets, Mike's News-Stand, Woodward's, the Royal George Beer Parlour, and the Legislative building. Here is a typical excerpt: "He ducked into Woodward's and asked a girl at the perfume counter if she had seen a big blue stallion come in. 'Only a pair of grays,' the girl replied, pointing to where a floorwalker was cleaning up horse turds with a feather duster. 'They went toward lingerie!'" (28).

In this chapter the impulsive, instinctual forces of nature, catalyzed by Hazard, are released upon the mechanical forces of the technocracy. And the progressive, reputedly stodgy oil capital of Canada becomes an orgy of confusion as the citizens run wild and give vent to their instincts. The bestial, virile past comes back to haunt the enclosed, sterile

present; and the artificial patterns of the town break down. On the spatial mirror, time has been reconstructed into a symbolic fantasy of chaos.

Both W. O. Mitchell, in his superb Alberta picaresque story "Patterns,"[21] and Kroetsch, in the forthcoming Gone Indian as well, delight in this sort of scene. In Studhorse and in both of the above works, an animal stampede (respectively, horses, sheep and buffalo) disrupts the artificial patterns of the town. Or speaking symbolically, the past has come back to haunt the only recently established present. E. A. McCourt joins Rupert Brooke in asking for ghosts in prairie fiction, especially lacking in Edmonton and Calgary.[22] Here are some ghosts.

To say that scenes like this one are "surreal almost" is apt in one sense because, as we may see in the manifestoes of the early surrealists,[23] the boundaries between the external world and the internal world are either vague or obliterated entirely. In the above scene (the horse stampede) they are vague; in the boxcar scene they are wholly obliterated. Both scenes evince the contamination of external reality by dream.

In chapter IV I referred to two things of relevance to Kroetsch's fantasized regional observations: the apocalyptic sensibility, in connection with Bugnet and O'Hagan; and the contention of natural values with civilized values, which is, generally speaking, what Studhorse dramatizes. A good example

of the apocalyptic sensibility at work is Kroetsch's chapter VI (the horse stampede). This sensibility manifests itself in the following disposition: a belief that modern man has become sinful or unworthy of the Promised Land which he has civilized; a fear that, in some form of violent natural disaster or holocaust, mankind in that region (Sodom, Gomorrah, Jasper, Lac Majeau, Edmonton, anywhere) will be destroyed; a belief that those who remain, be they animals, Indians, or the 'innocent' whites, are the land's chosen people; a tendency to erect these fears and beliefs upon a biblical scaffold, usually "Revelation."

We have seen, in the boxcar episode, how Hazard is haunted by the animal and human bones of the region's past. In the Stampede scene Hazard, who champions the cause of these regional ghosts, precipitates a comic revenge upon the sinful of the world. Demeter tells us who these are.

> You who stare blankly in your musty basement flats, in your rented upstairs apartments, in your so-called 'living' rooms full of TV and offspring, in your king-sized beds; you hot-pants secretaries skulking behind your typewriters, you matrons sweating in the illusory stink of the beauty parlor (forgive me if I smile), you executives hunched bony-kneed and hairy and straining in the john, you schoolboys in the library, using my precious wisdom to conceal your furtive lusting after the girl who doesn't know her skirt is up and her legs spread (or at least she lets you think she doesn't know); all of you who think you do not live in a madhouse-- do not smirk at Hazard's inability to recognize and to do what was best (142).

In John's "Revelation" those who "plunge into Balaam's error for gain" (the Tad Proudfoots of the world) are also

among the sinful.[24] In "Revelation" they have shed the blood of the lamb and cannot therefore be washed clean in it like the chosen people can. So the doomed sinners are assaulted and the lamb is exalted. "The lamb that was slaughtered deserves to receive power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing" (NT, 236). Hazard would wish the same for the slaughtered Indians, buffalo, and especially horses. In "Revelation," following the vengeance of the four horsemen of the Apocalypse, come the hordes of horses. "For the power of the horses lay in their mouths and their tails; their tails were like snakes, and they had heads with which they hurt people. Yet what was left of mankind, those who escaped being killed by these plagues, did not repent of the works of their hands and give up worshipping demons and gold, silver, bronze, stone and wooden idols, which cannot either see or hear or move, and they did not repent of their murders, or their magic arts, or their immorality, or their thefts" (NT, 238).

Nordo the sinful of Hazard's region repent of their ways. In another Edmonton scene, one which inclines more to the mirroring of external reality than to the surreal nightmare, Hazard once more disrupts the artificial pattern of the city, this time on Edmonton's High Level Bridge. Kroetsch's theme of contending historical forces manifests itself quite naturally in Hazard's encounter with the city. In very

general terms, they are the primitive entities of the past and the mechanicalor artificial entities of the present, the contest of horse vs. horsepower. An example is Poseidon's clash with the bronze statue of a rearing stallion (p. 30). A better example is this clash between Hazard and his horse drawn milkwagon and the truck driver.

> The bridge is a black iron tunnel in which patterns of parallel lines and acute angles are repeated and repeated until they knock at the senses like a film run too slowly; each picture is both separate from and yet like all others. Hazard survived this bludgeoning; then, on the far side of the bridge, at the southern exit where they must angle left and upward and climb a low rise, Poseidon, in his fright, scared two mares into the narrow lane that was choked with approaching traffic. A truck driver had the courtesy to stop while Hazard tried to calm all his fine collection of horses; they responded by pulling the milkwagon crosswise on the road. The truck driver responded by yelling at Hazard "Get that bloody milkwagon out of the way, you little pecker-head."
>
> "You hangnail pecker yourself," Hazard replied, throwing off his cape from his red sleeves and white gauntlets. In his joy at having acquired four excellent mares he became exuberantly reckless. "Get that roaring truck out of the bloody way and I'll get out of the way myself."
>
> The driver, a moose of a man, turned off his engine.
>
> "Don't ekerpa me, you pandering redcoat peter," he shouted back at Hazard.
>
> By this time an appreciative audience of pedestrians, most of them coeds on their way to the university, had begun to collect; little did they realize the trucker was offending the very core of Hazard's being.
>
> "You tool," Hazard said. "You faltering apparatus."
>
> "You whang and rod and pud," the trucker replied (42-43).

The bridge patterns bludgeon Hazard. The statues and vehicles assault his horse. And the mechanized present lashes out at Kroetsch. These outrageous clashes are an expression

of his historical consciousness. Note his rhetoric in ascribing to the truckdriver an artificial penis ('tool,' 'faltering apparatus'), or in endowing the bronze horse with a ridiculously small penis.

Upon an accurately visualized setting, then, Kroetsch obliterates not only the borders between the external and the internal world but he obliterates his temporal scheme as well, "reconstructing time" as Demeter says. These obliterations permit the region's past to participate actively in the region's modern era in dreamlike comic scenes which have the explosive force of a modern apocalypse.

As I have stated, Kroetsch's theme is the plight of natural energies encountering the mechanistic energies of the modern west. I stress the word 'plight' because Kroetsch through Hazard and eventually through Demeter, unravels his theme with a poignant sense of loss.

Kroetsch is by no means a modern exponent of apocalyptic doom. Rather, he holds this sentiment (for it is more of a sentiment than a belief) in check with his grip on the realities of his region. Demeter believes that "scurrilous, barbarous, stinking man would soon be able, in the sterility of his own lust, to screw himself into oblivion, to erase himself like a rotting pestilence from the face of God's creation" (174). But Kroetsch was raised on other regional myths as well, perhaps the most pervasive of which

was the belief that urban civilization and progress were not only inevitable, but a good thing as well. Kroetsch himself, in Alberta, wrote the following: "Especially in Edmonton and Calgary, one has the sense of a new and vital and sophisticated society about to seize the day. Now and finally in Alberta the future has a sufficient past out of which it can grow and flourish" (7).

Bringing together some of the outstanding themes in the first five essays of this thesis, one may generalize this far. The land we call Alberta has been portrayed by the great majority of its novelists as a land rich with romantic promise. And historically, as a route to the Klondike, as a gateway to the North, or as an oilman's bonanza, Alberta has given birth to enough success stories-- treasure hunts really-- to perpetuate (but not satisfy) the romantic quest. And whether for treasure hunters or romantic escapees who are simply overpowered by the beauty of the mountains, the land perpetuates the promise like some fickle mistress. Several postwar realists saw this pursuit as ultimately a vain one.

Parallel to the romantic quest which was to be reaped from the land is the love quest. Writers as various as O'Hagan, Ryga, McCourt, Kreisel, Van der Mark and Allen have shown that this too, as a solution, is vain. The romantic questers for the Promised Land are ultimately dissapointed in love as well.

Almost invariably, the love quest and the treasure hunt work together. The mistress which defeats Sym Ashley is ultimately the land and not Lina, for it is the land which becomes Lina's obsession, the thing which hardens her and turns her away from her human responsibilities. The land, no less than Moira Glenn, disillusions Neil Fraser. It is the rich land of the Peace River which initiates the legendary prosperity toward which Bea Sondern and her family hopefully flee. Before his death, Chris Sondern lives with the same dreams which possessed the protagonists of Van der Mark's and McCourt's novels. Tay John's quest, as well as those of Alf Dobble and Father Rorty, underlines the impossibility of finding love on the quest for the Promised Land. The land turns fickle; its blizzards turn cold. The women turn fickle or cold or both. Ryga carries this sentiment to its bitter extreme.

The logic which connects all of these accounts is proverbial. If a man's expectations exceed his wisdom in appraising the object of his desire, he is doomed to disappointment. The first romantic questers in Alberta fiction were Ralph Connor's oedipal evangelizers. They were followed by a host of emasculated questers for the Promised Land. And under the unusually conscious surveillance of his creator, Neil Fraser picks up this trend of men who seek in capricious love and capricious nature that which they will not find.

Protagonists as various as Duncan McKail and Sym Ashley make this same discovery. Banff and Jasper are not Paradise. The Peace River country is not an oasis. The southeastern plains are only fertile next year. Alberta is not Mecca for the pilgrims of fortune.[25] And womankind is as earthy and as much an animal and as capricious and as greedy as the men who pursue her.

Alberta was named after a daughter of Queen Victoria. The title mockingly labels a region with a strong sense, in pre-war times, of romantic complacency and Calvinistic restraint; and a sense, in postwar times, of romantic disenchantment. This irony is envinced in Kroetsch's short story, "The Man in the Winter Catalogue" when its protagonist, Schmidt, seeks refuge from the world in a foetal position on the lap of Queen Victoria's statue. The scene is the Edmonton legislative grounds. In all of Kroetsch's works since Exiles, then, we have something very new: a writer who not only recognizes the vanity of the romantic quest engendered by his region (as Kreisel, Bugnet, McCourt and others undoubtedly do), but one who is willing to combat that romanticism.

The reverberations emerging from tales of romantic love tell us a great deal about provincial attitudes toward the whole range of human experience. The love story is microcosmic. It connects us up with regional mores, class values, historical myths and social gestures. With Hazard's

indiscriminate flings with aging, sometimes scurvy matrons; with Backstrom's joyous espousal of adultery; with the birth of Demeter Utter, who promises to be a militant non-virgin; Kroetsch does an effective job of dispersing the romantic illusions which are general in his provincial kingdom. He is equally ruthless with the provincial success story so prevalent in early Alberta fiction as his portraits of Johnny Backstrom and Eugene Utter would seem to indicate.

On the subject of romantic illusions, it is interesting to compare Kroetsch's novels with one of the latest works to come out of the province, Herbert Harker's Goldenrod.[26] It has been enthusiastically received by American reviewers and it stands in explicit opposition to the fictive constructs erected by Kroetsch.[27] Ross MacDonald said in the New York Times, "Goldenrod does for southern Alberta what has never quite been done before by a novel. It converts it into a province of the imagination" (6). It is"essentially a novel of character and place" (29). Says Geoffrey James of Time, "The result is a book that goes a long way in defining a region that has been too little celebrated in Canadian literature. . ." (7). It is perhaps fortunate that MacDonald doesn't attempt to elaborate on his regional commentary, but James does. Here is an example of how he connects Harker to his 'province of the imagination:' "Sex, for example, he treats with all the finesse of the late William Aberhart: 'His palms were still

electric from the touch of her, and the tree that grew out of his heated loins could not endure the rough towel on its tender bark'" (7). There is only one way a critic can connect Herbert Harker's style to that of William Aberhart: by forcing the analogy. And this is essentially what both critics are doing, forcing an illusory region (the one created in Goldenrod) to suit an historical and geographical one.

I call Harker's southern Alberta an illusory region not because he is a writer without talent. He conveys a strong response to the dry terrain. He works effectively with the rural diction of his area. And he is often quite specific in naming the geography which he visualizes. But his region is nevertheless one which permits the survival of illusions and the verbal clichés which contain these illusions. Harker seems, with limited success only, to have transposed his version of the American dream into an Alberta setting.

Jesse Gifford, Harker's protagonist, is a bronc rider who achieves this dream: "the championship, the money, the ranch, the girl" (179); and the strutting pride that comes with it: "He was the Champ. There was nobody else as good at his business on this globe" (130). And the dream begins to bear fruit for Jesse as the championship, the money and the ranch are attained.

> For Jesse, the hell he had felt during his ride on Polka Dot had paid off. He had beaten Keno. Jesse was the winner that day, and with his presentation, the President of the Stampede Board gave a little sermon on courage and the thrill of watching a real comeback, until Jesse became so embarrassed he almost wished he'd gone home with J. T. Jones five hours ago. Still, the applause that welled out of the dark stands and flowed down over him was good to hear. He accepted the silver-mounted saddle and the check, and returned to stand with the other cowboys, the trophy on his shoulder. One thousand dollars. One thousand dollars in one lump. That brought his winnings for the week to fourteen hundred; for the summer, to seventeen or eighteen hundred dollars. For a moment he felt tall again-- so tall he could see right over the grandstand, over the lights of the Ferris wheel, over the miles of dark hills to a valley still green in the sunlight-- a place where darkness never came. He'd buy that valley now, and bask in its sun for the rest of his life (122-123).

These, of course, are the fruits of talent, and though they are hard earned, they nevertheless drop one by one into Gifford's possession with the help of his awsomely courageous sons Ethan and George. The girl is the last and hardest prize to be won. She is Jesse's wife Shirley, who, during Jesse's hard luck years, ran off with his bronc busting rival, Keno Ingram. Keno is uncompromisingly villainous. He beats Shirley, hates her children, grows rich shrewdly, and ridicules Jesse at every opportunity. Says Jesse with telling frustration "I can't understand you crawling in bed with that hairy bastard" (102-103).

But Shirley comes back, Jesse and his oldest son Ethan defeat Keno in battle, and the dream is fulfilled. Following is the happy reunion.

> Abruptly she sobbed and turned her head toward his shoulder. 'I don't know, how you would want me now.'
>
> Because my arms are shaped to you, like the twisted root of a tree when the stone it grew around has washed away. 'I love you, Shirl. I've never stopped loving you.'
>
> He felt her hand against his body, drawing him to her. 'Jesse'.
>
> She raised her face, and he could see in her eyes the reflection of the lamp, as soft and bronze as swaying fields of goldenrod (186).

Success and passion are the twin goals of talent. The Champ's drives are always two-edged, and in the following passages, approach a quality of hubris.

> But even while he writhed, he whistled to himself. In his pocket was a check for a thousand dollars, and in the trunk of the car, wrapped in burlap, was a silver-mounted saddle engraved to Jesse Gifford, Saddle Bronc Champion. Tomorrow he would tack the front page of the Albertan to the wall above his head. Then he would lie there for a thousand years and try to imagine how Keno felt when he opened the paper that morning. Wouldn't it stick in his craw to have his picture shoved off the front page by a worn-out old cripple like Jesse? Take that, Keno you bastard. Do you think a woman with Shirley's class wants to hang around with a has-been? And when you climb in bed tonight with your prick all shrivelled up like a peanut, what do you think will happen? First shoved off the front page; then shoved out of bed. Keno, you poor old bastard (128-129).

All the elements of a wish fulfillment dream are present when Jesse receives not only yearning looks from his estranged wife but the approbation of his fellow bronc riders. Here is a part of the toast offered to him: "'I reckon a host has privileges, and tonight it's my privilege to propose a toast to an old friend of mine-- a fella with more guts than a slaughterhouse-- you may be able to bust his back, but you'll never dint his spirit-- the man with the

carborundum grit, and still the best damn bronc rider I ever did see-- Jesse Gifford!'" (125).

Harker attempts to convey that the goals themselves and the pride they elicit when achieved are not the important thing. What counts is courage. Each time Jesse suffers a setback his or Ethan's courage to try again is what saves the family. What we have in this novel are the trappings of a spiritual quest by a wounded hero, but only the trappings. There is too much exuberance and verbal energy behind Harker's descriptions of the materialistic laurels of the success dream. The jingle of money rings through every chapter. There are eighteen dialogues involving money in the novel: spending scenes, money counting scenes, bartering scenes, scenes in which the comforting image of a large roll of bills recurs again and again.[28] And these convictions on the material joys of success are too often transferred to his people. Shirley, for instance, in at least two instances, is reduced to sexual property. Here is an example. "And Jesse had hugged his virtuous, devilish, beautiful little wife to him, and marveled that such an equisite property should belong to him" (71; see also the conversation on p. 126).

As the world's greatest bronc rider, Jesse Gifford is undoubtedly a fictional superman. But he has very little in common with the western Canadian supermen of novelists like F. P. Grove (Abe Spalding), Christine Van der Mark (Lina Ashley), Martha Ostenso (Caleb Gare) or even Robert Kroetsch

(Johnny Backstrom). All these heroes, including Harker's Jesse Gifford, are supermen in that they stand head and shoulders above their fellows by virtue of their success. But all of them except Gifford share in the culpability of the world. All of them are possessed, even consumed, by high ambitions, and quite realistically so. But Gifford emerges almost spotless, and for this reason he joins the company of hard and true heroes which dominated the fiction of Alberta up to the 1930's.

I mentioned earlier that unlike Robert Kroetsch, Herbert Harker characterizes his region with the illusions of wish fulfillment. As always in Alberta fiction, the terrain reflects the illusion. "Jesse had never known a morning like the one that followed. The sunlight that struck the slopes of the hills looked as heavy as if it had been taken from a palette; as if, should you touch it with your fingers, they'd come away yellow" (145). In certain ways, Jesse echoes the voice of Alberta's mythical past. His Champ fixation (and Harker's implicit elitism) as well as his optimism remind us of certain tendencies in the stories of the regional idyllists I mentioned in chapter II. In another sense, Harker's wish fulfillment dreams echo the sentiments of the American Dream. Jessie acts out the myth of the self-made man in harmony with redemptive nature much in the manner of so many American protagonists from Cooper

to Steinbeck. Jessie's quest to achieve this harmony draws in other minor themes: success in love, success in mortal combat against the enemy, success in the eyes of the public (as a sports idol), ownership of the land and the woman to go with it, and love of father and son.[29] Embedded in Harker's wish fulfillment dreams is the fable that, with courage and persistance, you can end things with that golden ride into the sunset. That is the reward of Champs. In this sense, Harker has more to say about Superman than Everyman.

On the other hand, Robert Kroetsch writes with a consciousness of and a critical attitude toward those mythical components. Success and ownership of the land and the woman involve an end to the spiritual quest through the old unmechanized west. This truth comes through clearly in Studhorse because Kroetsch, in spite of his tendency toward mythical fantasizing, writes about real, flesh-and-blood people, not spotless supermen.[30] There is none of this spirit of easy affiramation in Kroetsch's work. Nor is there much evidence in Kroetsch of the crude, materialistic reductions of human values which so often accompany this form of romanticism. In fact in the welter of fundamentalist guilt and consumptive glee or of horse vs. horsepower in constant tension, one often wonders whose voice is Kroetsch's. One is reduced to glib labels (a moral immoralist? A tragic comedian? A nihilistic enthusiast?). In his first two novels he is not exactly

affirming life but he is negating lifelessness. To affirm life as he so strongly does, Harker relies on the materialistic props which, although available only to winners (not losers), can sustain his illusion. But unlike Harker and all the regional idyllists, Kroetsch writes of anti-heroes in a post-heroic age. I have approached his canon always in terms such as 'contradictions,' 'oppositions,' 'ambivalences,' 'ambiguities,' 'contentions with chaos,' and 'tensions.' And of course this is the way Kroetsch renders his anti-heroes, always with the sense of the conceptual tug-of-war.

More than any of his fellow Alberta writers, past or present, Kroetsch attempts to articulate the consciousness which encounters Alberta. The dream-like quality of his episodes results from his transposing of his own consciousness. This is particularly so in Studhorse as Professor Ross has indicated (p. 20). Here, in his characteristically ironic fashion, he is not quite affirming art but he is negating silence. Like those of Johnny Backstrom, his roars bespeak a tortured but exuberant consciousness. Since he began writing in 1955, rendering that consciousness has been a fixation. Kroetsch is like both the brothers in "That Yellow Prairie Sky."[31] His consciousness is transposed into the Hornyak-Guy, Backstrom-Jonah, Hazard-Demeter tensions as well. When he contaminates the external realities with dreams, he is turning his artistic mode into a metaphor for its own concern. In a sense the story in his last novel is a

metaphor for itself. Kroetsch's Studhorse begins necessarily in the concrete images of his Alberta region, but reaches out well beyond its confines to make a statement about the difficulty of recreating the faded western Canadian past. Demeter's distortion and eventual destruction of Hazard Lepage, whom he attempts to replace, has its analogue in the artistic process. When the artist fixes his model in words, he renders the model inanimate, like the wax dummies and bronze horse in Studhorse. Within this context, the relationship between Demeter and Hazard suggests the art/life dichotomy, just another of the oppositions which reside within Kroetsch.

I mentioned earlier that one of the main themes to emerge from Studhorse was the plight of natural energies encountering the mechanistic energies of the modern west. This is the theme that Demeter, through Hazard, is wrestling with. But Kroetsch's over-riding theme is the artist's dilemma encountered in engaging this theme. The artist is the artificer whose flesh and blood subject matter evades him. His subject can live sensually in the real world while his creator must live vicariously with his file cards. The twin frustrations that emerge from Kroetsch himself through his latest novel seem to be these: the fact that his regional subject matter is evasive, and the difficulty of living his poem and writing it too.

The chaos associated first with Mike Hornyak and later with Johnny Backstrom, Demeter Proudfoot and Hazard Lepage is the chaos of a regional sensibility. It is the chaos of a writer who has witnessed the rise and fall of a rural evangelical social order and its replacement by a materialistic and secular one. It is also the chaos of a man sophisticated in the techniques of contemporary fiction who can elaborate these evasive regional contradictions and tensions into fascinating labyrinths. In short, Kroetsch's fiction is the most positive example in Alberta of a rendering of the regional fictional process: the intercourse of novelist and region.

CHAPTER VI

ROBERT KROETSCH

NOTES

1 But We Are Exiles (Toronto: Macmillan, 1965), p. 134.

2 Johnny Backstrom, Michael Hornyak, Hazard Lepage all long for chaos. See, for instance, Words of My Roaring, p. 101, or Studhorse Man, pp. 26-27.

3 Creation, (ed.) Robert Kroetsch (Toronto: New Press, 1970), p. 53.

4 The Words of My Roaring (Toronto: Macmillan, 1966).

5 Next-Year Country (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1951).

6 "Social and Other Credit in Alberta," The Fortnightly Review, 144 (1936), p. 528.

7 See L. V. Johnson and Ola MacNutt, Aberhart of Alberta (Edmonton: Co-op Press, 1970), p. 107.

8 See Aberhart, p. 109.

9 For specific examples see MacGregor, pp. 262, 266-267; W. E. Mann, pp. 112, 137; C. B. MacPherson, p. 245; in addition to the examples already cited from Johnson and MacNutt, Leacock, and Burnet. The first four of these texts were referred to in chapter I.

10 Kroetsch stated this to me in a letter dated June 4, 1970.

11 The Studhorse Man (1969; rpt. Richmond Hill, Ontario: Simon and Schuster, 1971). All references are to this edition.

[12] "Robert Kroetsch's Novels," forthcoming in Canadian Literature.

[13] From Donald Cameron's interview, "The American Experience and the Canadian Voice," Journal of Canadian Fiction I, No. 3 (1972), p. 50.

[14] This passage is explained in Cameron's interview, above.

[15] One thinks of Jake Barnes, Mark Jordan, Nick Adams and Frederic Henry perhaps, but particularly of Harry, the protagonist of "The Snows of Kilimanjaro."

[16] Perhaps Homer and Tennyson's Lady of Shallot enter as well into Demeter's allusive structure.

[17] Creation, pp. 59-60.

[18] Professor R. M. Brown in an early review of Studhorse (Canadian Literature 45, p. 90) states that the "controlling myth" of this novel is the journey of Odysseus. But he acknowledges as well that other myths inform the book. I do not believe I am contradicting him when I say that the Proteus myth is a better focus for an approach to Kroetsch's technique in Studhorse. But I am contradicting Brown when I argue that there is no single controlling myth in the novel.

[19] Two interesting examples of repressed sexuality seeking expression amid the piety of Alberta's fundamentalist milieu are Henry Kreisel's Herman O. Mahler ("The Travelling Nude") and Rudy Wiebe's narrator of "Did Jesus Ever Laugh?" in Fiddlehead 84 (1970), pp. 40-52.

[20] Creation, pp. 26-27.

[21] In Robert Weaver (ed.), Ten For Wednesday Night (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1967).

[22] The Canadian West in Fiction, pp. 120, 125.

[23] See Lucy R. Lippard (ed.), Surrealists on Art (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice-Hall, 1970), p. 120.

[24] The Complete Bible, An American Translation (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1923), NT, p. 232. All biblical references are to this edition.

[25] Margaret Laurence makes a similar statement about Alberta in Creation, p. 55.

[26] Goldenrod (New York: Random House, 1972).

[27] Time Magazine, July 3 (1972), 7, and The New York Times Book Review, June 11 (1972), section vii, 629, attest enthusiastically to Harker's novel, for example.

[28] See pp. 5, 10, 80-81, 84-85, 108-109, 110, 111, 114, 115, 116, 122-123, 128, 129, 136, 138, 149, 150 and 179 for an accurate financial statement.

[29] This cluster of themes does not by itself, reflect a strictly American sensibility. But in Harker's hands, Southern Alberta becomes much like the American wild west with its absence of strong authority figures or of respect for these authority figures. In Goldenrod the police make one feeble appearance. Jessie and his boys fight their own battles even in the physical sense. Compare this free-swinging notion with Alberta's cowboy novels since Connor's Sky Pilot. In writers like Stead, Paterson and Connor, and later in Kroetsch and O'Hagan, fist fights and brutality are either entirely absent, administered by the authority figures (usually mounties or those acting for the authorities), or treated comically. For a perfect contrast between American and Canadian attitudes toward authority in Alberta, see Dennison Grant, pp. 23-24. Heavily qualified exceptions to this general trend are in the adventure novels of W. L. Amy and Edward McCourt.

[30] This statement applies primarily to Kroetsch's male characters. Some of his women, for the sake of his rhetorical scheme, are two-dimensional embodiments of some vague feminine submissive principle. Kettle Fraser of Exiles is an exception but Helen Murdoch of Words and Martha Proudfoot of Studhorse are good examples of this type of characterization. They are objectifications of one or more men's love.

[31] Creation, pp. 16-25.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

From the turn of the century until the present time Alberta has had no lack of fiction writers to celebrate (or, occasionally, to denigrate) its dramatic setting and romantic spirit. A surprising number of key Canadian fictions were set in Alberta during Canadian literature's "Age of Brass" (1897 to the early 1920's).[1] I say surprising because Alberta was the newest province to be formed and settled in those years and possibly then the most culturally deficient province in the young dominion. With the regional idylls and romantic adventures of Connor, Stead, Stringer, McClung, Amy, Paterson and others, it was perhaps the most celebrated provincial region in Canada during this age, the age of the Canadian best seller. And in spite of a decrease since those days in the total number of novels published, since 1935 there has been a gradual emergence of regional fiction appropriate to the gradual cultural maturity of Alberta.

The best regional fiction between 1935 and 1950, with the exception of Tay John, was the realistic fiction (the first model of which was provided by Bugnet) best exemplified by Christine Van der Mark's In Due Season. But in the two decades to follow, with the exception of Henry Kreisel's

Betrayal, the best regional fiction has been too mythically oriented for conventional definitions of realism. We see in Kroetsch's three books, as we did in Tay John, attempts to map the inner workings of regional minds and myths. Whether the fiction belongs to realistic or post-realistic literary traditions is less important than its belonging to the broader category which I have termed authentic regionalism.

In considering one of the most recent books on Canadian literature, Margaret Atwood's thematic guide entitled Survival, one might argue that this not inconsiderable Alberta corpus of fiction has been overlooked.[2] She draws on the fiction, poetry and drama of slightly over a hundred Canadian writers, but only one Alberta novel is even alluded to (Howard O'Hagan's Tay John). This apparent oversight can explained, however, if one examines Ms. Atwood's thesis.

In her first essay, entitled "Survival," she claims that Canadian fiction is almost obsessively pessimistic. "Certainly Canadian authors," she says, "spend a disproportionate amount of time making sure that their heroes die or fail. Much Canadian writing suggests that failure is required because it is felt--consciously or unconsciously--to be the only right ending, the only thing that will support the characters' (or their authors') view of the universe" (34).

Unlike Saskatchewan fiction, for instance, to which Ms. Atwood devotes many pages, Alberta fiction simply is not saturated with incidents of death and failure. If anything,

it is afflicted with optimism. The disintegrated Saint Sammys of Saskatchewan literature become immortal Daddy Sherrys in Alberta. The neglected Mrs. Bentleys become cheerful Chaddie McKails, by love besieged. Chris Sondern remains in Saskatchewan and dies grotesquely, in the fashion of a true Atwood victim; Bea Sondern and her children escape to Alberta in pursuit of a fleeing vision of wild roses and happy times.

Henry Kreisel, Christine Van der Mark, Robert Kroetsch and Edward McCourt have incorporated a tragic vision into their regional novels, but as I have shown in previous chapters, the sense of unmitigated tragedy is always dispersed: in Kreisel, Van der Mark and McCourt largely through the use of irony; in Kroetsch, eventually through the use of comedy. Ryga and O'Hagan appear to be the outstanding exceptions, as Ms. Atwood would likely attest, but in the most realistic passages of the writers I have mentioned and in those of Harker, Niven and Godfrey, the sense of tragedy dispersed can be readily demonstrated. It is likely that the notion of sunny Alberta as a land strewn with wild roses and oil derricks has permeated but not saturated the best of Alberta fiction.

In early Alberta fiction the theme of escape to the pristine wilderness seemed valid enough to support the enthusiastic wave of escapist writers who wrote prolifically from 1900 to 1925. However this theme eventually proved too feeble to support a return-to-nature school of any substance

or size. The solitary spiritual values emjoyed by a scattering of communities in the early 1900's were incompatible with the progress and prosperity oriented ambitions of those who followed. The (sometimes well founded) legends of great wealth and natural beauty all over the province combined to produce a divided awareness of two incompatible goals. The subsequent realism which emerged in the thirties and forties dramatized the conflict arising from this impingement of Alberta's geography upon its novelists.

I spoke of this and other kinds of impingement, in chapter I, as part of a process germane to regional literary theory. The region impinges upon and helps to form the imagination of the writer. And the writer, in turn, discovers and recreates the region, forming it in a sense. In order to adhere as much as possible to this theory, most of the passages which I have cited are of a regional texture: scenic descriptions of known Alberta localities, dialogues which touch on some aspect of Alberta society, recreations of known historical events or passages ripe with regionally significant symbols. Historical accounts tell us that fortune hunters have been descending upon this province for nearly a century. More and more fiction writers seem to be bodying forth this dream. Historical accounts remind us as well that prosperity or desire for it is destroying some of Alberta's pastoral character: the ranch, the family farm, the formerly deserted

Rockies, the prospectors' and trappers' northern forest. And again, more and more fiction writers appear to be bodying forth this nightmare.

Thosewriters, such as O'Hagan, Mitchell and Godfrey, who (like the early Bugnet) championed natural values without accepting those of the inevitable civilizing forces, I have tended to consign to romantic categories. They appear to be impinging somewhat on the realities of history. And those writers, like Edward McCourt, Henry Kreisel and at times F. J. Niven, who acknowledge man's conquest of the wilderness, I have tended to consign to realistic categories. They appear to have allowed their locales to impinge upon them to a great extent. But even more of the postwar fiction has fallen somewhere between these two forms of awareness. These dramatize the moral tension between natural and civilized values which arises from the impingement of Alberta's beautiful and potentially wealthy terrain upon their imagination. Into this general area I have placed Harker, Van der Mark, Allen and Kroetsch, all of whom have, for better or for worse, remained unresolved in their allegiances to the growing technocracy.

To speak in very general terms, regional fiction throughout the English speaking world seems to have embodied this same moral tension between natural and civilized values. In writers like Thomas Hardy and D. H. Lawrence, the fact is

obvious. In most of American regional fiction this tension seems to have been dramatized as well. For example, Henry Nash Smith has said: "The capital difficulty of the American agrarian tradition is that it accepted the paired but contradictory ideas of nature and civilization as a general principle of historical and social interpretation."[3]

In Canadian fiction the same moral tension is central to regional writing. Commenting on French-Canadian pays d'en haut fiction, Jack Warwick says, "Two main views of the pays d'en haut emerge from history and geography of the topic: one regards it as a place for collective expansion and the other as a place for various kinds of private freedom."[4]

When I claim that an original expression distinct, say, from Saskatchewan fiction, is emerging from Alberta writers, I mean only that there are some good examples of fiction written about the region by writers alien to (or barely native to) but not insensitive to the Alberta region. It will be noted that I have devoted proportionately more space to Robert Kroetsch than to any other writer. And the fact that Kroetsch was one of the few writers studied who was born and raised in Alberta is certainly not incidental to the fact that he seems, more successfully than anyone else, to have assimilated Alberta's geographical and social terrain into his imagination. He has read a great deal of Alberta fiction from Connor to Mitchell and admits that one of the

most profound influences on his early life was W. O. Mitchell's short stories.[5]

The central themes of English speaking regional fiction are not much different in Alberta than they are (or were) in Mississippi, Sherwood Forest, Wessex or Canada's pays d'en haut. But what is encouraging about Alberta fiction since 1935 in general, and about Kroetsch's fiction in particular, is that to give expression to these almost universal regional themes, Alberta writers have relied upon the habit of close observation of their region's pecularities. In Kroetsch's work, for instance, we are not simply told about it; through a bizarre series of box socials, pig-butcherings, scenes of horses populating, country auctions, weddings and rodeos, we are induced to partake of his region with our senses. In the best of Alberta regional fiction, the writers have tended to follow their centripetal impulses which work to particularize their region (conceptually, emotionally, sensually, in many ways), at the same time searching for details which transcend its provinciality.

This heartening trend brings me to a sociological observation. Since 1935, and markedly since 1947, the incidence of racial prejudice in Alberta fiction has been substantially reduced. This coincides with an attitude towards region held by all the prominent regionalists from Bugnet to Kroetsch. It is easier to say what this regional attitude is not than what it is. Its spokesmen are not embarrassed by their region.

Nor are they apologetic about it. Alberta's lingering folksiness, its conservative flavour, its lack of rooted, urban sophistication, its stodginess, its unabashed materialism: all this may be the source of comedy, but rarely is it the source of disdain. But this attitude which seems to have characterized the best of Alberta fiction since 1935 is not simply the attitude of acceptance. Kreisel's "Nude," O'Hagan's Tay John, Bugnet's Siraf, W. O. Mitchell's "Black Bonspiel" and "Patterns" and Kroetsch's last two novels all have strong satiric veins in them. Their attitude seems too critical and questioning to be accepting. The attitude I have in mind is closer to one of fascination with something as yet undiscovered rather than acceptance of something already known.

Once this fascination has arrested the attention of the regional writer, his region and its inhabitants begin to announce themselves in their own terms. When this happens, men become recognizable as men and women become women, not racial inferiors or glamorized mysteries.[6] And what is more important, these men and women, in taking on human form, begin to bespeak the locality which has molded them. Tay John, as he witnesses with incredulity and distaste the erection of a tourist boom town, reminds us that before our Banffs and Jaspers there was a civilization located there which worshipped nobility and venerated heros. Daddy Sherry reminds us that life is short and that belly laughs are to be prized even more

than oil wells. Louise Bourgouin (of La Forêt) reminds us that this primitive world, idealized by Tay John and Daddy Sherry, is capable of avenging the conquests of the forest's invaders. And if Lina Ashley scoffed at Louise's fears, her own life would testify just as convincingly to the spiritual hardships of the conquest of the land. Neil Fraser reminds us that the fleeing visions of heroism, romance and success, witnessed to varying extents by Tay John, Daddy Sherry, Louise and Lina, have fled by the war years. But the miracle of Next Year Country, with its promise of rain and prosperity, is kept alive by religious prophesies and hope. And Johnny Backstrom reminds us of this. He belongs to the civilizing and politicizing forces which attempt to build for the future. And Hazard Lepage would likely counter that this future is a sterile one, and those who build towards its mechanized fulfillment are merely accomplishing the vengeance of the ravaged frontier. Hazard would have to speak through Demeter Proudfoot to say this, and eventually Demeter would agree with him. Mark Lerner would no doubt laud these people for their courage, tenacity and in some cases, optimism, and gently chide them for their ignorance of the rest of the world. Unlike any of them, he is a modern. He accepts the presence of the urban community as an unlamented fact. Lerner's voice and these other Alberta voices bespeak an emerging consciousness which will undoubtedly be carried forward in the most

perceptive examples of future Alberta regional fiction.

The dreams and nightmares of Alberta's history have been bodied forth in a handful of narratives in the recent past. Toward the northern half of the province they are usually bodied forth in images of conquest. Toward the southern and southwestern ranchlands they are just as often bodied forth in images of affluence and rugged individualism. To the East and Southeast the narratives are laden with the images of biblical plagues, hard times and dry land. And to the West these narratives are bodied forth in images of renewal and escape. It should be a source of some tempered and carefully guarded satisfaction to Alberta's readers of fiction that the makers of these narratives, from Niven to Kroetsch, have given to their dreams and nightmares a local habitation and a name.

CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSIONS

NOTES

1 The term is from Desmond Pacey's Creative Writing.

2 Survival (Toronto: Anansi, 1972).

3 Virgin Land (New York: Vintage, 1950), p. 305.

4 The Long Journey (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1968), p. 48.

5 Kroetsch told me this in a private interview, October, 1973.

6 The women of Kroetsch's Studhorse are not remarkable exceptions to this rule. They contrast favourably, because of their earthiness, with the women of the regional idyllists of the first third or so of the century. As anti-romantic fictive structures, I think they work well within the terms of Kroetsch's scheme in Studhorse.

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